

THE DANCING FAKIR
AND OTHER STORIES



THE DAUGHTER OF PERBHOO DIYAL

[See p. 11]

THE DANCING FAKIR

AND OTHER STORIES

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
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DEDICATED TO
PHYL

WHO HELPS ME
SEE THESE THINGS

Tadley, Hants 1922

CONTENTS

	PAGE
HISTORY FROM A HILL	xi
THE DANCING FAKIR	1
THE HEART OF TEK CHAND	11
A WORM'S TURNING	27
THE UGLY CALF	32
POETIC JUSTICE	43
THE MOODS OF SALEEM	51
THE FACE OF BRONZE	64
A PHILOSOPHER STAG	69
ARMS AND A BRAHMAN	76
THE JOY OF LITTLE TOTA	86
A PLANTER'S HOME	92
A WARRIOR FROM BHUT	102
THE LAW	110
THE HUMAN SPARK	117
A BRACE OF FOXES	124
THE SEED	134
ENDLEBURY'S TROPHY	142
THE PALE ONE	154
THE WEAK SPOT	167
THE POOL	174

ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
The Daughter of Perbhoo Diyal	<i>Frontispiece</i>
The Dancing Fakir	3
'As he sat at the street corner'	5
'There were snake-charmers from Khaspur'	7
'It was obviously a tremendous effort to him to move out of the path for a rider to pass'	28
'The panchayat ruled that he had employed black magic'	44
'He stopped to look back'	69
'The village consisted of squat huts of mud and straw'	87
'Two Bhutia men from the far North'	107
'The old man watched the road'	115
Kallu	125
Mubarik Hussein	125
'Pride was salved in the old, old way'	132
'He never took his beady eyes off Mir Khan'	171

HISTORY FROM A HILL

I'll take you in a tonga up the Tochi Pass at morning,

By Edak Fort and Saidgi, where the rocks are tinged with rose ;
Where Nature's barren bosom bears no green for her adorning,
Save where, beside the water, like a gem, the young wheat grows.

Steep hills, red rocks, grim boulders, for the feet that do not falter ;
Clear crags and slender crevices, for eyes that see afar ;
A fight for life 'twixt man and man, that ages cannot alter—
This prospect I would show you from on high by Miranshah.

Those shepherd men, blue-shirted, with dark ringlets and keen
faces ;

The shaggy sheep they follow ; and the leader's tinkling bell ;
Their food ; their nightly fires ; their weary sleep in stony places—
These change not since a wandering tribe broke off from Israel.

Ride up the road to Datta Khel ; climb where the stunted holly
Grows scattered on the hill-top. Here, three hundred years ago,
Swart Moghuls watched as we do, with a pang of melancholy,
The far-off snowy ribbon of the lonely Sufed Koh.

Then back to Máré Indus ; see, below, the fishers tying
Old craft, with slender rigging, in the quiet of the creeks,
Where women, scarlet-skirted, stood and watched their menfolk
plying
To and fro across the water at the passing of the Greeks.

Come Eastwards to the mountains, where the pilgrim folk are
toiling—

A bitter uphill journey—to do homage at a tomb.
How long ago their fathers saw that little white path coiling
Round forests, coloured crimson with the rhododendrons' bloom.

How long ago at night-time, huddled breast to breast, they
shivered

From piercing of the North wind which from Nanda Devi blows—
Then stretched themselves and marvelled, as the dawning daylight
quivered

Around the golden edges of the everlasting snows.

Last, Southwards—on Chamundi hill a shaven priest in yellow
Stands gazing at the country that abides most surely his—
The distant downs of Ooty, and Mercara, and the mellow
Rice-laden plains below him, and the kind blue Nilgiris.

If you would gather pictures of a land that never changes—
Where Brahmans, though three thousand years have passed, are
Brahmans still,
From sunny Coromandel coast unto the Northern ranges—
Then come as I would guide you, and see history from a hill.

THE DANCING FAKIR¹

CHAPTER I

JACKSON was an incorrigible drifter. He was generally referred to as 'that Jackson,' having no known first name, Christian or otherwise. In the bazaar also he was 'that Juckson,' without the appendage of Saheb. The bazaar knew his kind too well. Yet he was an Englishman of a sort—the sort that drifts.

Once, in better days, he had spent two seasons with a third-rate variety company in one of the Calcutta music-halls. He had shown really marked ability as a mimic, and could take off a native to the life; his patter songs were popular; even when drunk, as was frequent, he could keep a wonderfully serious face. But one night he returned from a strange revel in the Chinese quarter, and proceeded to divest himself of his clothing on the stage—slowly and impassively. It took six men a considerable time to remove him. He had a rooted idea that he was a Dancing Fakir, and with a dead-white face he made rings round the manager and his minions, until he fell insensible among the footlights. His theatrical career ended in that faint.

Jackson drifted on. The Calcutta race-course knew him for a time in various capacities—none of them above suspicion. At one time he was concerned with bicycles,

¹ Fakir = Beggar priest.

which he stole for another to hire out. This led to three months in jail. After his release he drifted from Calcutta to Bangalore, and thence to Bombay, where he helped in a motor garage, having a smattering of mechanics and a turn for toutting. From Bombay too he passed. There was a story of a drunken assault on a Parsee by a pale, pock-marked Angrezi¹ dressed in a dirty white cotton suit, an old khaki topi,² and canvas shoes, who passed by a selection of names—Williams, Duveen, Riley, Smithers, and Jackson. The police got track of him in the bazaar, in a street where his predilection for the rawest arrack³ made his capture seem a certainty; but he escaped. It was thought that he had disguised himself as a native. The reward for the tall, stooping man with the pale, clean-shaven face and the pock-marks was never claimed. Jackson had passed on. He was never heard of again.

CHAPTER II

The apotheosis of Jackson was in this wise.

He became a Fakir. Perhaps his success at the Calcutta music-hall suggested this unusual course. His remarkable knowledge of native idiom stood him in good stead, and he found the part easier to play than he would have supposed. His patter, with the impassive face, procured him free meals—even free drinks on the wooden platforms of country liquor shops. He never gave himself away, however drunk; for the more drunk he was the more he believed himself a Fakir. In a Fakir a certain wildness is expected; his dancing was looked upon as an idiosyncrasy, and gained him a reputation. He cultivated long hair, which he made tawny with henna; he wore nothing but a yellow cloth round his middle, and brown beads round his neck; a wild, wispy beard was also

¹ Angrezi = Englishman.

² Topi = Hat.

³ Arrack = A spirit.



The Dancing Fakir

grown gradually, and dyed red ; and white dust on his brown, naked body, and red caste-marks barring his forehead were easy. No one ever recognised Jackson. He had no name now. His wanderings are unknown ; he must have seen much—enough, at least, to make him forget that he had ever been Jackson.

Little wayside shrines knew him ; he could puff out vile smoke from the earthenware pipe, and spit, and make strange guttural noises with any beggar priest in India. He ate no meat, but he throve on grain and milk, gifts of villagers ; the Dancing Fakir became a finer figure on this fare than ever was Jackson. There is reason to believe that he drank less and less spirit. His diet must have stayed the craving. At any rate his physique improved vastly ; he was really tall now, without the stoop ; there was scarcely a taller Fakir in all the thousand villages he visited.

Though his wanderings have not been chronicled, it is certain that he was at Bijapur at the time of the riot. It was Ramlila time—a season of religious festival and plays and fairs. Bijapur was gay with people in their brightest clothes. The steps of the temple above the river were thronged. There were bathers in scarlet and in yellow ; women in blue and in red ; coloured strips of flags ; and, beyond, the houses of the bazaar were bright in the sun—light blue and yellow and white. In the narrow streets the crowds were promenading, chaffering, and admiring all day. In the cloth shops country folk were buying finery for Ramlila time—bright cottons, and tinsel for the children. All the booths were full of merchandise placed on little wooden platforms just raised above the ground, and the sellers squatted by their goods. Red, golden, and white grain was piled in heaps before the shops of the grain merchants ; farther on, a pyramid of oranges ; and beyond—in the street of the workers in brass—a great pile of brazen vessels flaunted the sun

The Dancing Fakir doubtless saw all these things, as he sat at the street corner listening to the talk of two Sadhus¹ with shaven heads and orange-coloured garb. He gathered that there was a good deal of ill-feeling



‘As he sat at the street corner’

under all the bustle and chatter. The Deputy Commissioner had forbidden the procession to pass down the Bara Bazaar on account of Mohammedan scruples about their mosque in that street. The procession was immemorial: curse that mosque; curse the Sircar, who ordered these things! There were extra police about too,

¹ Sadhu = A Hindu priest.

who had arrived by rail—an officer and thirty men. There were to be speeches at the mela¹ that afternoon; Babu Gopi Nath, the great speaker, was himself coming. He was the friend of Mahatma Gandhi Ji. The Sircar² was afraid of Gopi Nath. He was no mere windbag either, for he had led the riot at Khaspur, when many men had been killed. So ran the talk; the Dancing Fakir was well used to it. Hatred of the English and their ways had become a common enough theme in the bazaar, and he generally disregarded it. This time he heard more than usual. There was a whisper about looting the liquor shops, and the arrival of two hundred wild men from Khaspur. The Dancing Fakir wandered on. He did not care.

CHAPTER III

That year the crowd at the mela¹ beat all records, and the Bijapur maidan³ was filled to overflowing. On the outskirts, children rode on rough merry-go-rounds at two pies⁴ a time. There were conjurers who spent most of their time drum-beating to an audience always on the move. There were snake-charmers from Khaspur; a man who had crawled on all-fours from Hyderabad, and who now lay on the ground yelling strangely; a travelling show from Benares, the actors wearing red masks; three bands of one sort and another; and a Dancing Fakir who never changed his face. But the main attraction was a rough platform in the centre of the open meadow, where Gopi Nath was speaking. He was not much to look at—a little dark man with a moustache, glasses, and a small round black cap on his head. But when he held up his hand and began to speak of wrongs, there was a subtle change in the crowd. Hitherto there had been

¹ Mela = A fair.

² Sircar = Government.

³ Maidan = An open meadow.

⁴ Pie = A small coin.

idle bustle. Now there was a silence—then a restlessness ; an atmosphere of expectation ; something vaguely menacing. Gopi Nath did not rant ; at first he spoke slowly ; then took advantage of the lull to grip his hearers, following with an appeal of swift eloquence. He had caught that crowd : eyes stared ; breathing quickened ;



‘ There were snake-charmers from Khaspur ’

men pressed forward without knowing it. One by one the side-shows ceased. The Dancing Fakir was still, listening on the outskirts. No one moved, except the police in their khaki coats and red turbans quietly patrolling the crowd. Then there was a rustle—a murmur, like the sea. Gopi Nath was urging the crowd to loot the liquor shops, sources of the Sircar’s¹ wealth. Then later—one could not miss the words ; they were like a clarion call—‘ Hotel ’—‘ Club ’—‘ Blood of the English dogs ! ’ There

¹ Sircar = British Government.

came that unmistakable low growl of an angry mob, for one moment before the rush—then pandemonium.

Babu Gopi Nath had won them. The mob was beyond control; respectable people were fleeing from the ground to lock themselves in their houses. The rest were as one man—and that man was mad and would soon be drunk as well. Bijapur was only a Civil Station; it had no garrison beyond fifty police; Government was credited with trusting to luck in these matters; the English ladies were at the Club, playing tennis.

Babu Gopi Nath slipped off quietly to the car placed at his disposal by the All-India Non-co-operation Society, and was soon far away. After all, he was not a man of action.

CHAPTER IV

Then came the awakening of the Dancing Fakir. He did not consider explanations; he had never cared an anna¹ for the Government, and had been long estranged from his own kind. But he thought of the Club—half a mile away, at the bottom of the straight, broad road from the maidan. He had passed it the day before. It lay straight ahead, beyond the cross-roads, where you turned to the right for the Collector's Court and the Treasury, and to the left for the bazaar and the river. The crowd would keep straight on; it had one idea only: the Club was the goal suggested. At this thought, a little spark which had almost died in the Dancing Fakir glowed up and fired him. He became not Jackson, but Alfred Henry Jackson. He saw only the tennis players.

He would have to act very quickly; the police had been overpowered; the crowd were beating their dead bodies with lathis.² Just as well—they would hardly move seriously for a few minutes. There was a struggling

¹ Anna = A coin— $\frac{1}{16}$ of a rupee.

² Lathi = A bamboo pole.

mass of humanity outside the liquor shop in the little street abutting on the maidan. The Dancing Fakir suddenly grew active. He ran, leaping and shouting, to the liquor shop, passing a group of men who were beating two bunnias.¹ The shop was already alight; bottles and pipas² were broken, and the contents were streaming into the road. The Dancing Fakir knelt down, with others, in the dust, and lapped and lapped at the liquor. The spirit, to which he had lately been a stranger, fired his brain and gave him great strength. He could lead now—lead ten thousand men. He must lead them to the right at those cross-roads, towards the Treasury. He had seen a strong armed guard on the Treasury. But there was no time to lose: the crowd had begun to move; they were leaving the bodies.

Suddenly the Dancing Fakir leapt to his feet, caught a sword from a man near him, and danced madly through the crowd, yelling. He danced up to the nearest dead policeman, with leaps like those of a charging animal, and wildly hacked off his head; he snatched a long lathi, and impaled the head, tying it firm with the red turban. Then he raised it on high. People noticed the wild Fakir dancing through the crowd; two or three followed him; then more and more. Faster he went, and faster—the head aloft—waving his wild hair, singing. And the crowd followed him with an ugly sound, filling the wide road with a mass of running, pushing figures. The Dancing Fakir had only one thought—‘Would they turn to the right?’ Now they were at the cross-roads; he brandished the head and danced facing them, adjuring them, screaming at them. And they followed him. For a crowd is one man, and the Dancing Fakir had hit upon an old secret of leading rabbles. ‘They will follow something on high—and a head on a pole is the best leader of all. He was covered in dust; blood was on his face and body—and

¹ Bunnia = Shopkeeper.

² Pipa = Earthenware jar.

something unearthly in his eyes ; but in his heart he triumphed as he had never triumphed before. He led them right down the road to the Treasury ; the police reinforcements cut off their rear and barricaded the cross-roads behind them. The police guard on the Treasury held their fire till the crowd came very near, and then fired volley after volley.

The Dancing Fakir sprang high in the air at the first volley, and fell—quite dead.

THE HEART OF TEK CHAND

CHAPTER I

TEK CHAND was a Jat, of Rohtak district, near Delhi—one of an old-time race, which combined soldiering with farming, and had reason to be proud of both. His father and his father's father had both served over thirty years with the risala ¹ before they had settled down on the land. His uncles and his cousins, the whole of his 'bhaiband' ²—that brotherhood which sets the standard of a man's life in India as surely as do the Public Schools in England—were soldiers. Tek Chand was therefore a soldier by birth, inheritance, tradition; he asked for no other life.

Physically he was sturdy, thick-set, with strong chest and shoulders, and legs made for a horse. He had short black hair and a smooth face, in which the eyes were the best to look at. These were soft brown, and expressive—a trifle melancholy when he thought, but humorous and alive when he spoke. It was easy to see that Tek Chand felt things.

He was long remembered in the Jat school at Rohtak. Jats for the most part are honest folk, who do not ask for reasons. But here was a Jat who was not content to learn by rote; who puzzled over things and asked questions; who surprised the Inspector of Schools with his understanding of a map; who could write essays and

¹ Risala = Cavalry.

² Bhaiband = Generic term for 'relations.'

still be a demon at hockey. No one ever doubted Tek Chand's ability to earn thirty rupees a month as a babu¹; he might even have become a tahsildar²; but he preferred to become a cavalry recruit. Otherwise there would have been no opportunity for us to become acquainted with the heart of Tek Chand.

In September 1912, when eighteen years of age, he was borne away by his uncle, a jemadar³ of cavalry, to join the family regiment at Sialkot. There he found many of his seniors at the Jat school, who told him that to obey was better than to ask questions, and that the set of a puggaree,⁴ the sheen of buttons, and the gloss of a horse were acceptable to British officers, and saved trouble in the end. Tek Chand found new gods at Sialkot, and had little time to ask questions about them. There was riding-school in a cloud of dust first thing in the morning; then the daily routine of stables, feeding, musketry, recruit drill, watering—to all of which he took as a duck takes to water, and earned the label of a promising recruit, good with his horse, and intelligent. So two years passed. Then, on August 1, 1914, he was summoned home to take a wife. He had become a man.

CHAPTER II

In Jat land, marriages are not concerned with heaven. They are arranged by one's seniors. They are the subject of a deal of discussion, in which the relative positions of parents are all-important. Grey beards wag over bighas⁵ of land and head of cattle; horoscopes are unfolded; incomes are underestimated or exaggerated according to the interest of the contracting parties; and the bride-

¹ Babu = Clerk.

² Tahsildar = Senior Indian district official.

³ Jemadar = Native officer.

⁴ Puggaree = Head-dress.

⁵ Bigha = A land measurement.

price drives many a saintly father distracted. In fact, the parents are the only people really concerned. Hence it is not surprising that Tek Chand's first intimation of his approaching bliss was the following telegram :

‘ To Tek Chand, son of Bap Chand, C Squadron,
49th Risala, Sialkot :

‘ Have arranged marriage with the daughter of
Lakpat for thousand rupees ; get leave ; very urgent.
—Bap Chand.’

For the first time in nearly two years Tek Chand asked himself seriously—‘ Why ? ’ Frankly he did not desire the daughter of Lakpat.

Of course he realised his father's position in the matter ; Lakpat tilled seven hundred bighas ; he had endowed a school, and was a member of the District Board ; and Bap Chand owed him four hundred rupees on a mortgage. Altogether the alliance was so suitable in almost all respects that Tek Chand anticipated difficulty. Yet he made a solemn vow that never would he have the daughter of Lakpat—which sentiment indicates that Tek Chand was not as most Jats are.

Perhaps even he would not have gone to this length had it not been for another circumstance. Tek Chand had a heart ; and that heart was the property of the slim little daughter of Perbhoo Dyal. Perbhoo Dyal was a very poor man, though of good stock enough. He was not even a zemindar ¹—a mere tenant with occupancy rights over some thirty bighas ; a man of no social standing. Tek Chand's father would not have admitted the existence of Perbhoo Dyal.

The daughter he had seen often by the well and in the fields. He had watched her blue sari ² among the corn, and had marked her straight carriage when she fetched water for the home. She had been but a girl when he

¹ Zemindar = Landowner.

² Sari = Woman's robe.

had left—free to go in and out—always abroad in the open air. Her slim, supple figure ; her great eyes below the straight, level eyebrows ; her little head, well poised ; her soft voice—these were the things which had taken the heart of Tek Chand.

A friendship with her brother at the school had served him well, so that he had often met her at evening in the fields and spoken with her. The last evening, those great eyes had been misty, and she had said that she was sad at his going. Then he had told her that he would come to her, a duffadar¹ with three red stripes on his arm, riding a tall horse, to carry her away. She had promised to wait for him. Then they had touched hands in the dusk. That was all. But it was enough to kill the chances of the daughter of Lakpat.

CHAPTER III

Tek Chand got his leave. He did not join in the free talk in the crowded carriage which bore him from Sialkot to Delhi. His mind was occupied with two visions—a slim maiden with great, misty eyes—and a tall grey-beard with shaggy brows and eyes that flashed, who had been a rissaldar² in the King's Cavalry. Tek Chand's feelings were mixed.

The second telegram saved the situation. It was handed to him by his father at Rohtak station, and ran as follows : 'Leave cancelled, regiment mobilised, return at once.—Squadron Commander.' Tek Chand sent his answer : 'Returning ; tell commanding officer,' and rode back with his father for a meal, for which he had ample time before the midnight train. There was clearly no time, however, for the ceremonious visit to the house of Lakpat, when his father would count out the thousand

¹ Duffadar = Sergeant in an Indian regiment.

² Rissaldar = Senior Indian officer.

rupees before witnesses and seal the bargain. Tek Chand saw that he would be able to go back without hurting his father's feelings and calling down the inevitable banishment from hearth and home. Tek Chand had most of the elements of a dutiful son.

During the preparation of the meal he was able to find the brother of the maiden and to arrange for a certain meeting—which, in view of her now greater age, cost him two rupees. Then Tek Chand returned to his father's house, and was feasted on good milk and grain and herbs—they never ate meat. They talked long of the regiment; good advice was given; some characters discussed; but the telegram did not receive much attention—that was an order.

At ten o'clock Tek Chand embraced his father and his mother and set out on his pony, which he was to leave with a friend in Rohtak. On the way to the station he passed the house of Perbhoo Diyal, and in the field of Perbhoo Diyal he met his love. Her head was hooded, but he could see her eyes in the moonlight, and she was even fairer in his sight than of old. He asked after the health of her father and of herself, and heard her low reply that all was well. He explained his recall, and again promised to return when the work was over. With a nervous flutter of the eyelashes, she asked :

'It is said in the bazaar that thou art to wed the daughter of Lakpat. My father heard it but yesterday. It was a matter of common talk. Tell me—is the talk true?'

And Tek Chand answered :

'Fear not. It is but idle talk. It is true that my father has arranged the matter with Lakpat. But I will never do it—never. I am thy man. Do not heed the talk of the bazaar.'

'But thy father will be angered with thee. A thousand rupees is much. He will not brook the loss of a thousand rupees.'

Tek Chand touched her arm and said :

‘ But the thousand rupees has not been paid, nor can be paid till I return. And I would not wed the daughter of Lakpat, even were she to give me a lakh ¹ of rupees. I tell thee—have no fear. I am thine, and thou art mine. Is it not so ? ’

He just heard the answer, ‘ Yes, I am thine,’ and said, ‘ I will return for thee.’ Then he touched her hand, and looked at her and met her eyes, and blessed her in his heart. So he left her, and mounted his pony and rode away. When he looked back, she was watching him under the moon, motionless. She listened till the sound of the pony’s hoofs had died away on the dusty road. Then she gathered her shawl and slipped away.

Such was the love-making of Tek Chand.

CHAPTER IV

Tek Chand found the regiment in a bustle. War was in the air, and they were mobilising for service. The departure of other regiments was watched with envy ; then, after three weeks, the horses were sent off, and at last they received orders to proceed by rail to the sea. On the great evening, they marched down to the station in high spirits. Tek Chand loved it all. There were two bands—one at each end of the platform—playing different tunes simultaneously ; all the depôtwallahs ² were there to shake them by the hand ; many sahebs ³ had come down to the station ; flowers were given to the great ; they went off, shouting incoherently, and Dhule Chand had to run fifty yards to catch the moving train, minus his puggaree, amid much merriment. Then the train ran out into the dark, and Tek Chand was on his way to the war. The

¹ Lakh = Ten thousand.

² Depôtwallah = One who remains at the depôt.

³ Saheb = Englishman.

other men soon disposed themselves and slept, but he was too excited; he thought long of his return, triumphing, to claim his bride. Who shall say that Romance had not entered the heart of Tek Chand, sowar¹ of cavalry?

To follow Tek Chand to France and through the years of war would take many pages. But a few pictures must needs be given to illustrate the perpetual novelty of his life. Everything encountered during the first few months was new; everything must be compared, measured, explained. Most of the Jats took the new for granted, and only wondered at the mighty bandobast² of the Sircar. The first view of the troopship only evoked the remark 'Be-shaqq bahut bara hai.'³ The surprise of the sea only led to a sucking-in of the breath. But Tek Chand took nothing for granted. He marvelled at the means whereby so tall a ship could remain upright; he pondered, too, on the adaptability of the horses, already aboard; they seemed so used to it. But he could not speak, at that first memorable sight of the sea. He looked at it, and his gaze remained fixed. He had a feeling of sadness at a thing so infinite. All the villages which he had seen would be as nothing on its surface. What were bighas⁴ and biswas⁴ here?

For the first two days of the voyage they were all para⁵—utterly and completely sick. To stand up for the Captain's inspection was torture; for the rest of the day they lay in heaps of misery. Tek Chand, when he could stand up and think, readjusted his ideas of the sea. He came to look upon it as something vast and alive—not inert, like a maidan.⁶ He would sit in the sun, and watch the waves, looking for the life which gave them movement. He did not formulate his thoughts in this language,

¹ Sowar = Trooper.

² Bandobast = Organization.

³ 'Be-shaqq,' etc. = 'Without doubt it is very big.'

⁴ Bigha, Biswa = Land measurements.

⁵ Para = Prone.

⁶ Maidan = Meadow, plain.

but they took this trend. He asked many questions of the lascars, for which they invented ready answers, but when the voyage ended he felt that he had really never solved the sea: it had beaten him. In his first letter from France he told his father that the sea was a very great old beast, but that it had an end. At which the old man remarked 'Be-shaqq'¹; what idea of the sea he carried away is beyond surmise. Beauty of sun and wave had no conscious effect on Tek Chand, who was too elemental and needed the tangible. But the wonder and majesty made him silent, and he felt small.

His first European town was Marseilles, where he spent a month, while they refitted for winter service. Here he gathered his first impressions of the West.

They marched up from the docks through the middle of the town, and he thought the world marvellously full of sahebs. Girls—smiling and speaking in a strange tongue—waved at them, walked along beside them, kissed their hands to them, actually shook the hand of one or two. This was very strange to Tek Chand, in whose eyes a handshake from a saheb was an honour reserved for the great. He spent some weeks readjusting his ideas about the new saheb log.² He never got used to their freedom from restraint, nor ever quite liked it. He preferred to think of some one who was shy with him, and who spoke slowly and low.

He walked often in the Cannebière, and admired the shop windows; but he only once ventured inside, when he bought his wrist-watch—a lifelong treasure. The barriers of glass seemed to cut him off from the joys of purchasing, and he preferred the freedom of the bazaar, where lingering was encouraged. The Cannebière crowds were his greatest joy. Here were soldiers from every part of the world—British, French, Belgian, Algerian, Russian; he loved

¹ Be-shaqq = Doubtless.

² Log = Folk.

to compare the uniforms, and always liked the brightest. Friendly Poilus spoke to him, and he would smile back with a 'Comment ça va ?' The crowded trams which bore them to the town gave pleasant travelling ; there was none of the formality of the Indian rail, and he wrote to his father that in France the trains run where they will in all the streets. Down in the docks he saw ships of every size and build, lying alongside the big warehouses. Tek Chand's ideas of the size of the world were being quickly extended—too quickly for complete understanding. It must be remembered that he had thought Rohtak the world not so very long before. He was bewildered, but forgot nothing. Throughout, he was aching to get to the war.

CHAPTER V

While Tek Chand was extending his horizon, what of the daughter of Perbhoo Dyal ? Her horizon extended no farther than the limits of a little village and a few fields. Of war she knew nothing but that it took young men away—young men who had not even begun to come back. Her father and her brother were more interested in the price of grain and goats than in the events of a war in another world. She could neither read nor write, and there was no news for her beyond occasional distorted bazaar rumours. Tek Chand did not write to her—it would have been no use—but he sent her formal messages through her brother, saying that he was well and at the war, and liked the Francis.¹ For her there were none of the occupations which made the time pass somehow for maidens in like condition in France and England ; no war-work ; no leave, with its bitter-sweet excitement ; none of the fever—the nearness of terrible events, the tantalising elements of snatched joys. Her

¹ Francis = Frenchman.

life went on exactly as before—the life of a drudge in her father's house. Probably she was the gainer.

She was very simple too, and never considered the possibility of any other life but the one she was leading. This is not to say that she was without imagination; she pictured Tek Chand incessantly, and dreamed of the manner of his return, when she would be his drudge, to deal with as he would. She became increasingly beautiful, retaining her looks more by instinct than design. She saw how soon other women withered and grew old, and compared herself with the daughter of Lakpat, to her private satisfaction. The daughter of Lakpat was growing monstrous fat.

Her life was healthy on the whole, for her father was too poor to have a daughter incessantly sitting in the house. Happily for her, young men were few, and her father humble, so that no pressure was brought on her to wed. Her one fear was lest her father might take another bride, or her brother marry—in which case they would speedily get rid of her. Here, again, poverty stood her in good stead.

For the rest, she was shy and retiring in the presence of other women—and she never spoke to a man.

One thing she never questioned—the certainty of Tek Chand's return. He had said that he would come; therefore he would come. When? But here the infinite patience of the East, and the inherent ability to wait—season in, season out; from rabhi¹ crop to kharif¹ crop, rainy time to dry time—helped the years to pass. One other thing—in her simplicity she never considered the possibility of Tek Chand's forgetting. She was too primitive for suspicion. The heart of Tek Chand was in good keeping.

¹ Rabhi, Kharif = Crop seasons.

CHAPTER VI

Tek Chand went with the rest into the trenches near Festubert, where they stood in icy mud up to their hips for periods relieved by floundering marches and weary sleep. The appalling cold and the mud affected him more than did German shells. He had expected something like the latter, though not so startling—besides, *izzat*¹ forbade one to notice them. The German himself was but a vague enemy beyond a line of ragged wire; the mud and cold were the real foes. To Tek Chand they seemed living forces, and he believed them part of the magic of the dushman.² Some of his bhaiband were hit, and many went down with trench feet, accepting their fate in a sleepy fashion. Tek Chand loathed the sense of cramping, of weight; he volunteered eagerly for patrols, and proved clever in the dark. His chief occupations, however, were digging, and wiring, and attending to his feet; the one thing absent from war seemed to be the fighting. Yet he kept remarkably fit, and never grouched. After a month or so, the regiment moved back.

They had a period of training—in billets. As cavalry, they trained to go through a gap in the line; as infantry, to dig trenches and to throw bombs; as patrollers, to read maps and learn new country. They became essentially men of all work.

They were happy in the French villages, and made good friends, learning the kindness of the peasant, and the joy of sitting round a fire and drinking great bowls of chocolate. They even got a sense of home in these humble billets, and learned to expect kindness and to do little services. Tek Chand was quick with the language, which helped him form his ideas of the peasant life. He found the same routine as in Rohtak—hard daily labour, and

¹ Izzat = Pride.

² Dushman = Enemy.

weekly visits to market. He noticed a greater freedom for women ; girls went as they pleased, and seemed none the worse for it—these girls were not as the daughters of Marseilles. He came, in a word, to the understanding of the simple life of the French peasant ; it was on his own plane.

He wrote thoughtfully of all these things—but war he could not convey in words. There was too much delay and mystery, and he had no grasp of the great system behind. Like everyone else, he simply obeyed orders, and longed for action. When they went up for readiness in the great battles, and waited in that vast welter of war stretching behind the line—at Loos, and on the Somme, and at Bullecourt, and finally at Cambrai—and saw air-fights, and heard a thousand guns, and watched the prisoners streaming down the road, Tek Chand experienced almost uncontrollable excitement. He was doomed to many disappointments—for the time of cavalry was not yet—but he never lost hope. He believed intensely in victory, and the organization of the Sircar was as a god to him. Inexhaustible power stood revealed. Weakness in the Sircar seemed impossible ; the enemy had the forces of evil on his side—that was all.

Here Tek Chand learned his greatest lesson ; he came to see with his own eyes the strength of Britain and to understand her dominion. Weakness or paltering to enemies he would have been incapable of understanding. He gained a new creed when he went up to those battles, which was to cause him distress in the later days of the Sircar's weakness in India, but which never died.

CHAPTER VII

News from India was of the scantiest ; no soldier was farther from home, from that point of view, than the Indian, and his stolid patience had much to contend with. Old Bap Chand had trouble with a money-lender, and

urged Tek Chand to return and be the support of his old age. Of course Tek Chand could only advise him to see the Collector Saheb and state his case—Tek Chand had an implicit faith in the sahebs. Then the old man wrote to say that the daughter of Lakpat had been married to the worthless Shimboo, and that her dower had been fifteen hundred rupees. Shimboo was Tek Chand's own first cousin, and the affair had given rise to a good deal of family feeling, upsetting the old man, who never really recovered from the shock. Tek Chand, however, rejoiced at his escape; Shimboo was a greasy bunnia, afraid of his own shadow; he had bought a jewel indeed with his fifteen hundred rupees, and serve him right!

Then, a month overdue, came a post card in the hand of his mother's brother to the following effect:

‘Tek Chand, your father is dead, and Shimboo is taking the fields and the house. Return at once, or you will suffer a great loss.’

Tek Chand mourned long over his father, and pondered much over Shimboo's treachery, but he could do nothing beyond forwarding a humble petition through his Colonel to the Collector. He became silent, and shunned company, obviously distressed and without interest. His Squadron Commander noticed this and had a talk with him, with the result that Tek Chand became an acting lance-duffadar,¹ and then a pukka² lance. The moment of promotion was wisely chosen, and he forgot his depression in the joy of his little command. They were in the trenches at the time, near St. Quentin.

Then Tek Chand had a further honour; he was chosen to lead the bombers in the first raid. They were trained behind the line, fifty of them. Their orders were clear: after a five minutes' bombardment they were to advance from a position in front of the wire—first wire-cutters,

¹ Lance-Duffadar = Corporal.

² Pukka = Full, complete.

then bombers, then moppers-up—and clear up a portion of German trench for prisoners. All went according to programme till a machine gun on their right opened fire, and no signal came back from the wire-cutters. The bombers waited five minutes ; then Tek Chand whispered to his officer, and went forward, picking up the only unwounded wire-cutter on his way. He gained the wire, cut his way where the shells had not done their work, sent the other man back to give word, and jumped over the German parapet. Three men immediately threw up their hands—grimy, sodden little men. Tek Chand dashed up the trench to the right ; met two more men ; clubbed his rifle and felled one ; butted into and over the other ; threw a bomb at men coming up the stairs of a dug-out ; heard the machine gun round the next parapet—and went in bald-headed. He put that machine gun out of action single-handed. He could not have said how he did it, for he was an automaton at the time. He must have killed two men, and two must have run ; he certainly had an impression of four at first. Then a bomb—thrown by one of the grimy men, had he but known it—burst at his feet. He felt a great tearing pain in his left leg, and threw himself into the machine-gun emplacement. There he lay still.

The raid was reported most successful ; several German dead had been left, and two prisoners had been taken. A machine gun, which had caused initial damage, had been put out of action.

The lance-duffadar waited till the moonlight ceased, and then crawled painfully back to the front line, one leg shattered. That leg was taken off above the knee that same evening at the casualty clearing station.

When Tek Chand became conscious, he had only two sources of unhappiness—he would never have that night again ; and he would never ride on a tall horse to claim the daughter of Perbhoo Diyal. Otherwise he was radiant.

CHAPTER VIII

Tek Chand's career in the cavalry was at an end. In hospital at Marseilles the Colonel Saheb actually paid him a visit, and shook his hand, and called him *bahadur*.¹ But, though he yearned to go on, he was sent back to India with a nice new leg, in which he took great pride. Throughout the long voyage and the railway journey he talked of the greatness of the Sircar in war, and dreamed of the daughter of Perbhoo Diyal. . . .

Meanwhile the object of his dreams was ill at ease; her brother had at last announced his intention of taking a bride, which meant trouble for her. She had no news of Tek Chand, and had seen the house and land in the possession of the evil Shimboo. So she sat sadly at home, and rubbed a brass water-pot, on the great evening of her life. Soon after sunset, her brother came in and said simply:

'Tek Chand would speak with thee in the field. He is coming down the bazaar.'

Then she felt a wonderful joy flooding her, and went out with eyes shining. So it came about that Tek Chand found his love even as he had left her—shading her eyes—gazing up the road. He took her hand, and they talked long in low voices. To her Tek Chand was as a god—his lameness only making him the dearer to her. To him she was the great reward—the realising of a thousand dreams. . . .

They went in, hand in hand. There was a deal of talk with Perbhoo Diyal, but the issue was never in doubt; Tek Chand had become very masterful. He would oust Shimboo from his ill-gotten gains, and then make his marriage. He left the little hut full of purpose.

That night Tek Chand slept at the house of a cousin, and heard the whole story of Shimboo's machinations.

¹ Bahadur = Brave.

It was common talk that he had taken possession of house and land ; that he expected a civil case and had prepared accordingly—visiting an evil little vakil¹ in Rohtak, and trying to gain over the patwari,² who had refused to give false evidence. Tek Chand learned the names of the men who would bear witness that Bap Chand had signed away his property to Shimboo shortly before his death. Shimboo's father-in-law was said to be paying the expenses. The magistrate was new, and it would be difficult for Tek Chand to win his case.

Tek Chand had no intention of going to court. He had seen things done in a better way. When Shimboo opened his door for an early visit to the fields, he found a lame but formidable man on the threshold. There were no witnesses ; Shimboo was taken in an unfamiliar grip and shaken till his teeth rattled ; till, shivering, he went to his box and produced a dingy piece of paper, which was torn in pieces ; till he swore that he, his wife, and his servants, his goods, his cattle, his carts, and all that was his, should be off the place by evening. There was no argument—the better man simply gave orders.

So it was that Tek Chand came into his own ; his marriage with the daughter of Perbhoo Diyal followed as a matter of course, and in her care we may allow to rest that invaluable asset to the British Raj³—the heart of Tek Chand.

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You may call on him any day. He will be wearing the Distinguished Service Medal, and will show a wooden leg. He will always give you tea. If ever you had doubts as to the existence of the old spirit of Indian loyalty, you will be reassured. He is well worth a visit on that account alone.

¹ Vakil = Lawyer.

² Patwari = Village official.

³ Raj = Rule.

A WORM'S TURNING

CHAPTER I

HE was a nameless Dom¹—a natural slave if ever there was one. He was utterly out of keeping with these days of Labour Unions and limited hours and representative Government—an anachronism, a survival of the days when men were herded and driven. It was such as he who laboured in old-time quarries, and drove galleys, and piled the Pyramids. So he was out of his time, a blot on the landscape, and a mockery at the beneficent Government which professed such high care for the untutored masses of India. Yet he was not alone; he toiled with hundreds of his kind—men and women—along the mountain way leading to Bhawali. He was a carrier of wood; Heaven knows how many times a day his task was to carry a great solid block of Sal wood—six feet by one foot six by six inches, or something like it—for a mile and a half up the hot, dusty path.

He was only familiar to me because he was older than the rest. His face was seamed and lined, and his hair grey. He carried his solid block of wood on his back, lengthways; a rope passed across his forehead—which was bound with a dirty cloth—and another rope under his arms. He lived stooping forward. The weight was obviously as much as he could stand; he was just able to put one foot before the other, and the muscles

¹ Dom = Labour caste in the hills.

of his calves and thighs always trembled. He looked perpetually on the ground, with eyes that started a little out of his head, staring. They had no expression, save



‘It was obviously a tremendous effort to him to move out of the path for a rider to pass’

of intense strain. They saw nothing, noted nothing. They were the eyes of an animal—or of a slave.

Sweat poured from his face and limbs, for all that he wore only a little wisp of dingy cloth round his waist and loins. It was obviously a tremendous effort to him to move out of the path for a rider to pass. When he did,

it was with the stumbling, tottering gait of a blind beast of burden.

When he rested for a few minutes, he still could not escape his plank : he had to stand upright, with the plank resting against the wall of rock at the roadside. His face on these occasions showed utter weariness—the other men talked and laughed ; but with him it was as if life had been squeezed out, leaving but a blind automaton. He would rest in silence—then get up and plod wearily on.

He had a little time off for food ; otherwise he did a full day—work that a beast would have done in the plains, and that a rope railway might have done years ago in the hills. He had no encouragement ; there was no question of efficiency or despatch ; pay was according to the weight carried on each journey, and the sole standard of ability was weight-carrying capacity. There was no pension for long service ; he and his kind carried wood—or heavy cases or pianos, as the case might be—until they dropped. At night he must have slept the sleep of a worn-out beast. If he thought at all, he must have been haunted by the fear—‘ One day I shall not be able to get up with the wood when they load me. The babu will send me away.’ Then release—utter poverty—death. He could hardly have escaped that thought—he was so clearly past the work.

I knew the babu by sight ; he was the pay-clerk of the local contractor to the Forest Department. I have reason to believe that he took his toll of the Doms—a small commission for employment ; perhaps an anna in the rupee ; only six per cent. His name was Debi Datt—a tall, weedy specimen, who affected English dress and perched his little cap jauntily on the side of his head. He had a black moustache, shifty brown eyes, thick lips, and no chin. He walked about with the swagger of a cavalryman, and the assurance of a millionaire—but you could have blown him over easily enough. To a Dom he

was a domineering bully ; to a saheb he was politely offensive ; he wanted kicking. I also know that he had run through a number of clerkships in various offices, earning the encomiums of ' incorrigibly lazy,' ' insufferably idle,' ' utterly untrustworthy,' and so on. The Forest contractor had taken him on because he was his nephew, and cheap. The latter word aptly describes him.

I did not see the finale between the babu and the Dom, but I heard the account of an eye-witness.

It happened on the hottest day of the year in the hills—just before the rains. Debi Datt was despatching—telling off the men's burdens, weighing them, and noting them in his little book. The Doms moved slowly off in parties of six. The weighing was done at a point where the mountain path broadened to a width of seven or eight yards, thus giving room for a clearing station. Below, as usual, there was a steep khud¹—a sheer drop of fifty feet.

The turn of the old Dom came, and he moved forward for his burden to be adjusted. It was a particularly massive piece of timber ; an ordinary person would have found it difficult to raise one end of it off the ground. The old man murmured something, to which the babu replied roughly. The timber was duly adjusted ; the order was given—' Chalo !'² The old Dom strained to raise himself, but failed. He looked round at the babu with a world of pathos in his eyes, as if to say ' You have me beaten at last.' The look was that of an animal—asking for nothing, hoping for nothing—accepting fate. But he did not give up. Again and again he strained, groaning at the weight. At last he really did almost stand up—his joints cracking—then collapsed again.

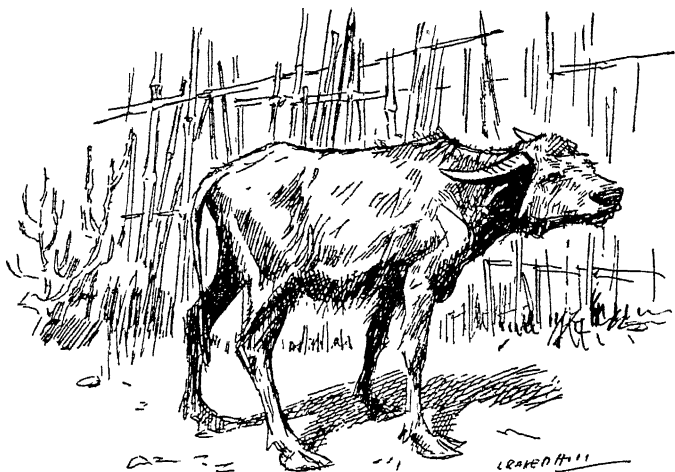
It was then that the babu kicked him—once, twice, in the ribs with his pointed shoe. There was a grunt of pain, like a sob, and then the unique thing happened.

¹ Khud = Precipice.

² ' Chalo !' = ' Get a move on !'

Without an alteration of expression, but with a gigantic heave of the whole body, the old Dom was on his feet. He stood for the slightest instant, feeling his balance, and then swung sharply round. The whole weight of the butt of timber struck the babu, sweeping him back, spinning him over the khud.

Then the old Dom overbalanced and followed him, the timber bumping against the rocks. There were two dull thuds a long way below. . . . No worm had ever turned more effectively.



THE UGLY CALF

A STORY OF THIRTY-SIX HOURS

CHAPTER I

THE Ugly Calf had nothing in his favour. The boy, Bulbul, aged eight, who ruled the destinies of the herd single-handed, referred to him invariably as 'Woh Khattra';¹ even Bulbul's fine stock of epithets was exhausted; he could only weakly call him 'That young beast'—which he was.

The Ugly Calf was always last of the herd: last out in the early dawn; last to be found for the evening drive home, when Bulbul was hungry; last in the dusty procession of stupid, ugly buffaloes—and easily ugliest. His face was vacant even for a buffalo—long and skinny, with horns awry; his hide resembled the black mud in which he wallowed all day; odd hairs grew out of it,

¹ 'Woh Khattra' = 'That calf!'

impaling stray straws. He was neither fat nor thin—just scraggy—and his cloven hoofs were all over the place. There was nothing to be said for him. Yet he served his purpose ; he made history.

It was near sunset. The herd was straggling home from the big plain of rough grass, with the swampy jheel¹ in it, where it had browsed and wallowed all day. Bulbul had got them on to the cart-track, which skirted a thick piece of tangled jungle, stretching like a claw from the great forest. Through the cloud of dust he could see the smoke of his village, and the mud tops of some of the houses.

Bulbul sang as he followed the herd ; after all, his name was Nightingale, if his song was not ; his song was his own—and mostly unprintable. He passed within one yard of the tiger.

The tiger was young and strong and bold. That day he had followed the stream, which intersects the claw of jungle above Fatehpur village, from the hills. He intended to make this his headquarters for a time. The village meant buffaloes ; the stream was good drinking ; there were thick spiky palms in great depth on either bank, which neither man nor elephant could face ; and he was first in the field. He had seen worse places for a summer residence.

He was in full winter coat—bright orange gold, which showed up his stripes well. But he was well hidden, as he had chosen a thick bramble bush, and lay on dead leaves ; besides, Bulbul was singing, and the main body of the herd were wandering along the grassy meadow on the side of the road well away from the jungle. So Bulbul passed the tiger nearer than he would have liked. So did the Ugly Calf, who of course was well behind, nosing in the dead leaves.

Bulbul had not gone ten yards beyond the bush when

¹ Jheel = Pond.

he heard a scurry behind him ; he whipped round to see the tiger on the Ugly Calf's back—covering him like a tawny cloak, bearing him instantly down.

Bulbul did not stop to see any more ; he made for the village yelling 'Sher!¹ Bara Sher ! Woh Khattra ! Sher hai !' and the herd stampeded, and knocked down part of the padhan's² fence. For a long time the village was wrapped in dust, from which issued the sound of much talk, in which Bulbul's shrill explanations predominated.

So no one saw what afterwards befell the Ugly Calf.

CHAPTER II

He was quite dead—his back broken. The tiger stood over him for a moment and watched the stampede—then took a firm grip of his neck and dragged him into the jungle. First he took a deer path, which was easy ; but his goal was a shaded little patch of grass near the stream, and he had to go through some very thick stuff. The Ugly Calf's legs were awkward, and his horns caught in creepers ; however, the tiger was young and lusty, besides being hungry, and he only stopped once to strengthen his grip. As he neared the open place, the grey Langur apes scolded him hard ; a peacock gave a harsh cry, and fluttered to a farther tree ; and a bright little jungle cock streaked away as fast as his legs could carry him, followed by his three hens. His red comb and golden neck made a pretty flash of colour—but the tiger cared for none of these things. He had killed—and neatly too—on his first night ; and he liked young buffalo—a bit scraggy perhaps, but good meat.

At last he came to the place where he had lain up for the afternoon and had destined for the Ugly Calf's last resting-place. It was a little depression, surrounded by thick thorn bushes, leading down to the stream ; there

¹ Sher = Tiger.

² Padhan = Head man of village.

were two big shady trees, which made it a cool dining-room; and there was a track made by drinking folk on a good line towards the main forest.

So the tiger dumped his meal down under the biggest tree and had a short prowling round, humming to himself. It was all really very pleasant. Then he had his meal—not a full dinner, for he meant to explore twenty miles of his new country that night. So he had a nice snack—just the dainty bits. Having no fear of being disturbed, he smacked his chops over it and showed his appreciation. The Ugly Calf had never been so well appreciated. Then the tiger had a little roll and a big drink and pulled the Ugly Calf well in under the thorn bushes so that the vultures might miss him. So, larder filled, he strolled very quietly away in the dusk by the path. Some monkeys swore and kept it up for quite five minutes. Then, much farther off, a Sambar stag gave his signal of surprise—a noise like one blast of a horn—and ran wildly somewhere in the forest, making a great scuttering. Last of all, a little chestnut barking deer barked hoarsely far away—and again and again at intervals, always farther and fainter. Then he too was silent.

The tiger was well away on his nightly gasht,¹ ahead of the moonrising. The Ugly Calf lay quite invisible.

CHAPTER III

The moon rose slowly in a deep dark-blue sky. As she rose she played with the shadows, changing them gradually; making depths where there were none, and light spaces like shallow water—all rather fantastic and unreal. Tones of light made up for the absence of the colours of day, and all the ground was like water—in pools—treacherous.

But the little drove of wild pig—mother pig and four

¹ Gasht = His beat.

little pigs—did not seem to find it so. They were rooting along very intently—mother head and shoulders ahead, the rest jostling behind. They had an air of business; they obviously knew what they wanted and would get it. There was purpose here—no mere random work. The quest involved a good deal of snorting and grunting and sighing, and wherever they went the earth was scratched up.

Soon they got into touch with the Ugly Calf. Mother stopped dead; up went her head, and down went her head; the little ones surged and jostled forward, and were promptly nosed back. Here was discipline as well as purpose. Mother investigated, snuffing hard; she peered at the Ugly Calf and sniffed him and breathed over him—but she never touched him. Finally she retreated with her unwilling offspring, and evidently drove home a lesson in grunts—‘Fresh meat! Tiger’s meat! Much better to-morrow! Come along!’ And they went, grunting intently, far away.

For a while the Ugly Calf lay in silence, save for the sound of dewdrops falling from the big trees—like rustling footsteps. These fell all night—the only regular sounds.

Now the tiger is very cunning, and he knows it; but he is also supercilious. Observed of all, he is under the impression that he is unobserved—for he does not count monkeys and jungle fowl as possessed of intelligence. So this time, as often, he had been watched—by a little, grey, fugitive, palpitating, but hungry shadow. The shadow had marked his larder and seen him off the premises, and now made for the Ugly Calf—nervously, now stopping with a foreleg up, then trotting a few paces. He was an insignificant little jackal.

Here was a self-effacing pilgrim! But he showed that the Ugly Calf was becoming an object of interest, a centre of attraction. The Ugly Calf had begun to count for something.

The jackal was moderately happy ; that is as far as a jackal ever gets ; he is too nervous for complete bliss ; and he has a melancholy strain, as his evensong shows. He never really got down to the Ugly Calf. He did a lot of investigating and tugging and tearing at trifles, but he looked up too frequently for real business. He did not do the Ugly Calf the justice of taking a square meal off him, and, on the first note of the nightjar, he took himself off, shrinking and silent, more quickly than he came. He was taking no risks ; this tiger might be impulsive ; one never knew.

Thereafter the Ugly Calf lay in peace, with the dew falling upon his hunched, crumpled body. Occasionally the nightjar marked the passing of the night.

CHAPTER IV

The moon had gone ; the jungle grew lighter—it would be hard to say from what source. There was a luminous something which slowly showed detail—showed it truly, unlike the misleading moon. And there was a stirring ; the hint of a breeze, causing a shower of dewdrops. The bright little jungle cock shook his wings and crowed, and then crowed again, to show that he could do it better. He woke his hens and took them along to scratch under the bushes where the pig had been. They ran all round the Ugly Calf without bothering about him. Every moment the little cock looked brighter and grew more active, darting at the tiny insects on the ground. He was the fellow for getting up—he had always beaten the old peacock, who now strolled across the glade, waiting for the sun and colour. And, sure enough, the sun did come out for him, and he spread his tail a little to get the dew out.

Then, as at a signal, all sorts of folk woke up. Little birds twittered ; there were movements everywhere in the trees and the undergrowth ; a kingfisher flashed up the

stream past the peacock as if to say, 'I am brighter than he.' Only the Ugly Calf lay there unobtrusively—the one really still thing. Yet he did not escape notice. Three busy shrikes had espied him; round him they flew; the coast was clear. One sat on the branch of a tree; the other two sat on the Ugly Calf—blue birds, with black heads, beady eyes, long tails, and the brightest red beaks in the world. They had him to themselves for half an hour, and they made good work. It was all in order; the sentry was duly relieved at intervals; the Ugly Calf was decidedly popular; he gave scope—better than mice.

The shrikes did not leave him through fear. They left for a very excellent reason; they could hold no more—flying was imperative.

The sun was well up now. The pig had passed to lie up for the day, after a glance at their prospective meal. The monkeys were making a great to-do, racing from tree to tree, squabbling. The flies—never backward—had renewed their acquaintance with the Ugly Calf, who could now neither flap his ears nor switch his tail. He had become more than a centre of interest—he was a thoroughfare.

Suddenly, afar, a dozen peacocks cried; a large animal rushed through the forest, stopped, and rushed on again; a herd of spotted deer beyond the stream lifted their heads and took their path. It was as if some disturbing influence were moving down the stream, causing a spirit of unrest. There was. The tiger was returning, and he was annoyed; this he betrayed by an occasional whining growl and a swish of the tail. The fact was that he was late home. He had prospected far; to his annoyance, a covert where he had expected good cheetal¹-stalking, had been full of woodmen's camps, with fires—he would get nothing there. The cursed red dog had been in another good place and killed or frightened everything in it. So he had been rather farther than his normal beat. He did not know the

¹ Cheetal = Spotted deer.

country, and had almost blundered into the path of an elephant—would have quite, had he not heard the voice of a hated man. This again caused a tiresome *détour*, and he had got into stony ground—the wide bed of a dry river—and stones always bothered his feet. He was so upset that he glared at the monkeys, who were proud of the attention. However, there was one consolation—the Ugly Calf. On drawing near, he lay down and listened, thinking of his meal and feeling slightly better. Then he took a short walk round to see that the coast was clear. All was well—only a humming of flies—they did no harm. He went up to the Ugly Calf, pulled him out a little; there were sounds of tearing and chopping and smacking. When these ceased there remained only half an Ugly Calf. The tiger had a drink in his favourite pool, a stretch and a roll, and crept into a patch of long golden grass for his sleep. The place was certainly comfortable.

CHAPTER V

It was about noon when the Ugly Calf really extended his sphere of influence. From being an object of interest to a few, he began to advertise his presence to many. He signified. The sun and the soft breeze were of course responsible. The breeze was blowing towards the stream, and soon every living thing possessing a nose within a good distance of the Ugly Calf was aware of him. The herd of cheetal, lying in the cool shade across the stream, sniffed, and again moved on, for their instinct told them that a tiger had killed.

It came to the pig in their snug little lair, and they welcomed every breath of it. A big vulture, who had just satisfactorily finished off the last remains of an unrecognizable carcass, and was dozing on a tree near by, stretched his skinny neck, and flapped heavily over the woods up wind. He hovered for some time, looking

at the likely places ; then he saw the black mass lying half under the thorn bush, and pitched in the biggest tree. He really could not tackle it at once. He would keep an eye on it—one eye.

Soon another vulture—the merest speck at first—hovered and swooped down to join him. All through the day fresh recruits dropped from the skies, and sat in the tree, waiting. Occasionally they scuffled for a place, as all liked to keep that one eye on the dinner. Otherwise there was no sound but the hum of flies. The sky was a deep blue—unclouded—a hot, sleepy day.

The tale went farther afield. A leopard, lying in a knoll beyond the valley, stretched and wondered whether it would be worth while in the evening to look round. He decided that it would not. He was pretty sure of one of the spotted deer. Besides, he had heard the tiger, and had decided to range farther away. Tigers were annoying, of course, for this place had been won by him in fair fight—but tigers were tigers.

The old black bear got it at last. He had had a good long sleep in a snug hole under a fallen tree trunk, near his favourite grove of wild red plums. Plums were good ; but this was meat ! He was very partial to seasoned meat of another's killing.

This was good beef. The Ugly Calf might have felt flattered, for no one had ever hinted that of him alive. The old black bear had not seen or heard the tiger, and, being rather stupid and very self-opinionated, ignored everything but the fact of the meal. He decided to miss his plums that evening.

So it was that the idea of the Ugly Calf exercised a number of great minds through that hot day.

Now the pigs were the greediest, and also the most purposeful, and they meant to be on the spot first. They arrived just before sunset, and after a sniff or two, and a certain show of nervousness about the tiger's whereabouts,

let their appetites get the best of them. Mother held the fore-front of the stage, but the others did well enough, and mother only interfered with them when they made too much noise about it. The vultures opened both eyes and fidgeted.

That afternoon the tiger overslept himself. He had had a tiring night and a big meal on top of it. Even when he awoke, he lay still, idly pondering—then decided on a little snack now, and a full dinner later. There was something attractive about a midnight picnic. He got up and walked slowly and very quietly along the deer-path towards the Ugly Calf, and then, to his disgust, saw the pig engrossed. Now, the tiger absolutely refused to eat after pig; it was a pity, but there are things which one cannot do. It was tainted meat now; the only thing for it was to go. Being masculine and proud, he refused, so to speak, to recognize the pig, even to the extent of disturbing them. Let them have their filthy meat.

So the author of the Ugly Calf's popularity stalked off ungratefully and angrily. The jungle marked his departure with cries, oaths, warnings, and flights, as the jungle ever will. Truly a tiger is a heavy responsibility—a tyrant whose movements are all chronicled. Everything living in that claw of jungle felt ill at ease until the tiger was well out of it and the danger signals had ceased—except the pig; and it has been remarked that they were very intent.

The portly old bear puffed as he extricated himself from his lair, and took the direction indicated by the morning's tidings. For his size, however, he moved quietly enough, only making one mistake, which the tiger would never have made. Within ten yards of the Ugly Calf, according to his nose and not his short-sighted old eyes, he trod on a dry twig. The twig snapped. Mother pig looked quickly up and gave one short grunt.

This was enough for the bear—he did not wait to see the pig scatter. He turned and ran as he had not run for days. Discretion went to the winds. He crashed through the trees ; splashed through the stream ; scrambled up the bank ; and did not stop for three miles, and then only from sheer exhaustion. He sat down and spent a long time wondering what he had seen, decided that meat never really agreed with him, and finally dined off old buried walnuts in a little grove far up the hill-side. In the joy of rooting about, he recovered his self-esteem. But he did not approach the Ugly Calf again.

To return to that hero of the narrative—there is little left of him. When the pig had scattered, the vultures descended like an evil cloud. There is no refinement about vulture meals—no dignity and no polish. Their only possible epithet is ‘effective.’

The Ugly Calf may safely be left to them. By noon to-morrow he will be in no position to provide further free meals. His bones will whiten and grow green ; he will become part of the jungle—an element in decay and growth. He has paid his life subscription.

POETIC JUSTICE

CHAPTER I

No one would at first sight have credited Am Singh with supernatural powers—he looked altogether too normal, and too stupid. Yet the panchayat¹ ruled that he had employed black magic, and the word of the panches was law. How else, they argued, could Kishan Singh's cattle have strayed three days in the jungle, and lost all their condition? How could the mother of Moti Ram have lost her silver ornaments on the rare occasion of a bathe in the river? How did the thatch of Durga Datt catch fire, causing Durga Datt to expose his sacred body in the chill night air? What else could have cracked the liquor jar in the shop of Kallu Ram on the very eve of a wedding? And, at that wedding, what else gave the bridegroom those agonies in the stomach, which lost him all interest in the ceremony?

There were other matters too, all incidents of the same ill-omened week, and the cumulative effect pointed to one thing only—magic. So said the panches under the big tree, inspired by the fumes of a long black pipe, and the panches ought to know, if anyone did. Given the magic, the identity of the magician was an easy matter. Was not the grandmother of Am Singh a noted witch?

¹ Panchayat = Local Council. (From 'panch' = 5—the number of the members.)



‘The panchayat ruled that he had employed black magic’

Had not his aunt gone mad at the Chitrasila fair ? Had not his father won the suit against Moti Ram, the chief panch, in the face of five carefully coached witnesses, all in complete agreement, and two unimpeachable deeds of transfer ? Did not Am Singh owe his present prosperity to the said suit ? Was not Am Singh in consequence the most unpopular man in the village ? . . . The thing was too obvious for further discussion. Am Singh was the culprit. Let the brotherhood be summoned.

It was a very impressive scene for all but Am Singh. Moti Ram had a dignified beard, long and yellow, which he used to emphasize the points of his speech ; other beards too supported him under the great tree, wagging in unison, while the merely beardless made up the outer fringes of the circle. Full fifty persons had gathered there to witness the downfall of Am Singh, and quite a dozen had the special incentive of owing him money.

The object of all their solicitude was a stupid-looking, sheepish youth of some thirty years, who had the suspicion of a cast in his left eye, and a decided stammer. His cheeks were round and his nose blunt ; he had prominent ears and a low forehead, and was beardless in the presence of great beards ; nobody loved him ; his bit of property would go to ruin. Large tears made rivulets in the dust on his very black face, whenever he thought anyone was looking at him.

He had no eloquence for his defence ; all he could say was 'Mera qusur nahin hai—kabhi nahin' ¹ at intervals in a whimpering voice which nobody heard, while his lanky body shivered. He was frankly ignored until, after due consultation, Moti Ram rose and proclaimed the dread sentence, in which the words 'huqqa ² pani' ³ resounded from the beard as from behind a curtain, clear enough to tell Am Singh that he was outcast, cut off from the common

¹ 'Mera qusur,' etc. = 'It is not my fault. Never.'

² Huqqa = Pipe.

³ Pani = Water.

pipe and the common water, degraded from his caste—down and done for.

He lost his head completely and blubbered, while they drove him from the village.

CHAPTER II

Outside the village there was a large patch of thick lantana, where jackals lurked in search of rubbish—a desolate, stony place, for all the pink and orange blossoms on the bushes. Through the middle of it ran a dry, rocky nullah¹ from the jungle, and near this nullah Am Singh sat and mourned. The fountain of his tears, turned on so easily and to so little effect, was dry at last, and, as the sun set, he hugged his knees and rocked sorrowfully to and fro, like a lost child.

Well might he feel lost; his caste, with its ties and its hourly rites and observances, had after all been the mainspring of his life; so used to it was he, that to lose it was like losing his eyes. He had no place now—no hold on life—no hope anywhere. The smoke rising from the village; the sound of the cattle homing; the bark of dogs; chatter, and the snatch of a song . . . these things told him what he had lost, and pulled at his heart.

The curious thing about him was that—beyond a desire to twist the beard of Moti Ram—he felt no animosity. He knew that the charge was false; there was no magic in him; but, unjust as it was, it was fate. Somehow, doubtless, he deserved it. Had an emissary come at that moment from the village and told him that for fifty rupees he could regain his caste and his pardon, he would have paid the money gladly, nor thought of redress. He was altogether a very simple creature, was Am Singh.

But no plenipotentiary came from the village; only

¹ Nullah = Water-course.

jackals trotted by him, like grey phantoms, as the sun set and the dark came on. But Am Singh, hungry as he was, still sat there, as if dazed. Soon he slept.

He awoke with a start, at a sound very close to him—the crackle of a dry leaf under foot. He thought at once of the big leopard which had haunted the lantana patch and had strewn it with the carcasses of ponies these many years, and he lay quite still. The moon was at the full and had just topped the hills, so that the dry nullah was clear and white, and in the nullah he saw—not a leopard—but men.

There were many men—twenty at least—and they were filing carefully, stooping and crouching, in the direction of the village. Some carried lathis,¹ and one



or two, guns, as their silhouettes showed; they gave an impression too of size and of wildness, seeming big men and hairy, with glistening skins, and the furtive movements of animals. Without a word they filed down the nullah, silent as wolves. Beyond, the village was asleep.

Am Singh was petrified with fear; these were of course the ghosts which also were reputed to haunt the lantana patch. In his grief he had quite forgotten that he was in an evil place. There was no question of moving now—they would spring upon him, and beat him to death with their lathis—torture him.

Hours seemed to pass, while the moon rose higher and higher, and the chill night-breeze came down from the hills and rustled the bushes, as if little feet pattered.

Then a nightjar cried near the village, and was answered from beyond by another—like an eerie echo.

• ! Lathi = Bamboo pole, shod with metal.

Then, sudden and clear, there came the sound of a cry, full of terror—then a gunshot. Am Singh started, then sat very still.

CHAPTER III

Am Singh knew what was afoot; shrill, quavering cries rose above the din of the village, suddenly awakened; 'Daku,'¹ they said—'Daku'—and bore in them the terror of men and women attacked in the dark. There is no more fearful a word in India than 'Daku,' for it means lawlessness and wild force let loose on peaceful homes and weak people; violence without mercy; wild eyes in cruel, black-bearded faces; blows on grey heads, and blood, and fire, and the loss of precious things. Truly the Daku log,² who make slaughter a business, are the greatest terror in India.

All this fear entered into Am Singh, taking away his manhood, weakening his limbs, so that he sat and shivered in a fever of terror, powerless to shut out the things which he saw and heard.

There were several gunshots, followed by cries and shrieks. Then a spout of red flame; another; soon the village was aglow, crackling as the straw roofs took the fire. Then came the sound of scudding feet; noises of smashing and tearing; the cries of animals in fire; then a man screamed in torture, first shrilly, then moaning.

The screams pierced the very brain of Am Singh; he must shut them out, or go mad. And mad he went, scrambling up the dry nullah, stumbling over stones, head down, running blindly for the hills. On and on he ran, till his lungs swelled, his breath came in gulps, and his eyes saw fire; then he blundered into a big rock, and fell headlong.

¹ Daku = Dacoit; one of a band practising robbery with violence.

² Daku log = Daku people.

When he recovered, he was lying in the nullah-bed near the foot of the hills. Above him was a precipitous bank, from which a tree hung precariously, black in the moonlight; on the other side the round stones of the river-bed stretched far into a waste of pale sheeshum trees and rank grass. He was lying at the turn of the gorge, where in the rainy season the river rushes full from the hills, eating into the high bank. But he had no time to think of his position, for he could hear the hue and cry coming up the nullah, with a running fire of shots, and a babel of shouting. He would be seen there; he could never cross the wide shingle in time. He took the only other course, and somehow climbed the high bank, using the tree for purchase, and sending down a profusion of pebbles and rocks. On the top he lay still, and only just in time.

A man came running on the gravel below, gasping and choking. In the shadow he stopped, and dumped something heavy on the ground, then seemed to scoop and scrape among the pebbles, finally piling stone on stone. Near as he was, Am Singh could not see him, but he could hear every action. In three minutes the man was running on, flitting like a shadow up the nullah, while almost on his heels came a bevy of chowkidars¹ and police, who followed him into the dark wood above.

Am Singh waited till he could hear the hue and cry far in the forest, and then, trembling but curious, he climbed down and searched among the loose stones till he found a little pile in a crevice at the foot of the rock. Scattering the stones quickly, he came upon a bundle, inside which metal jingled and chinked, and paper crackled. He replaced the stones, and quietly climbed the bank again.

By dawn he was five miles away from the nullah, hurrying from bush to bush, taking advantage of cover,

¹ Chowkidar = Watchman.

till the sun rose. Only then did he pause to look inside the bundle.

When he undid the knot, silver rupees showered from the bundle, and beneath he found greasy notes in batches tied with cotton. Stupid as he was, Am Singh knew the value of rupees, and could count. Before the sun had cleared the hills, he was aware that the bundle contained a thousand rupees in notes, and two hundred and thirty-five in silver—and, better still, that the name Moti Ram was written in shaky Hindi on more than one of the notes ; Moti Ram, then, had been forced to disgorge.

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When, a few days later, Am Singh returned to the village, he was magnanimously received back into caste by a chastened brotherhood, since it was clear either that he was no magician at all, or else a powerful one. His subsequent prosperity and great wealth were regarded as proofs that the panchayat had been for once misled. A new and a beardless panchayat now ruled the destinies of the village, and Moti Ram had something else to mourn besides the loss of one thousand two hundred and thirty-five rupees—the Dacoits had burned his beard.

THE MOODS OF SALEEM

CHAPTER I

THERE is generally a terror of the border—a daring leader of a raiding band, who harries the Hindus from Kohat to Dera Ismail Khan, and serves to make or mar the reputations of police officers.

Sometimes he is romantic—a figure of humorous escapades and legendary escapes ; sometimes he is merely cruel, a fanatic with a knife ; sometimes he is whimsical, an idealist ; always he is clever. But the terror of terrors was Saleem.

His main characteristic was his power of creating mystery—a valuable weapon. But he seemed to combine all the qualities of the terrors, appearing as the knight-errant, the fanatic, the humorist, and the idealist by turns. He was distinctly a man of moods.

Whenever his name was mentioned, the Political Agent looked sage, and preserved a discreet silence, indicating that he, at any rate, was *au fait* with the movements of Saleem. In a sense he was ; the khubr¹ of his ragged emissaries was often quite correct ; but his knowledge was never less than three days late—or, in other words, Saleem was always at least three days ahead of his hunters. Three days is a good start to one who knows the hills—seventy miles, maybe.

Saleem was the unexpected, the elusive, the incalculable

¹ Khubr = Intelligence.

element of his day—the fox who could be relied on to show sport over any line of country; but he always baffled hounds in the finish, though once he went to ground. But of that later.

Some facts were known of him; for a short time he had been a militiawala,¹ and had made off from one of the outpost forts with a brace of service rifles. Then, invested with holiness, he had become an active mullah,² preaching jihad³ with fiery eyes . . . young, with a hairless face, clean-cut and appealing. Then had come a feud with a rival mullah, and a dagger between the shoulders, and Saleem had gone away—to Kabul, it is said—to grow a beard.

That beard became a notable feature. Red as a fox, and wild as the grass on Dardoni, it served as the outward sign of his genius and the emblem of his calling.

He was very tall, so men called him a giant; very agile, so men said he had the speed of a horse; but for his cunning they found no metaphor.

From mullah he turned freebooter, with a special penchant for Hindu bannias.⁴ At the outset he had discovered that all eggs are best not placed in a single basket, so he had no special base or field of action, operating from Khost or Kalat, or a number of other places, by turns. If he had some favourite wild spot that he called home, the site of it is unknown.

There was a regular Saga about Saleem and his lady, 'The Rose of Samargha,' whom he had carried away on his saddle on the eve of her bridal to some one else, and who was said to love him with a love passing human. She had given him a son, a fair-faced youth, who accompanied Saleem on his raids.

So much men knew of his history.

¹ Militiawala = Frontier Militia-man.

² Mullah = Mohammedan preacher.

³ Jihad = Holy War.

⁴ Bannia = Shopkeeper.

The company of Saleem was limited ; when he operated, they were never more than seven all told. How often had infantry and cavalry, with police and village levies as well, been turned out to hunt those same seven men !

The Superintendent of Police estimated that he also had a receiver and two spies, one of them permanently in Nabbu ; he was nearer the truth than he knew, for the Nabbu spy was his own mali,¹ on fifteen rupees a month !

CHAPTER II

The escapades, authentic and otherwise, attributed to Saleem are almost innumerable, but one or two may be cited to show him in his moods.

There is the affair of the Adjutant's polo ponies.

Anyone who knows Nabbu knows what the Lukki gate is like on a market day—the pall of dust ; the crowd of loose-clothed, lounging Pathans, with their sacks and their bundles of green stuff, and their sugar-cane sticks, and their carpets and their blankets ; the troops of donkeys, carrying net-bags ; the sheep and the goats and the camels ; and, above all, the ceaseless chatter and the firm determination to block the road to all comers.

It was a hot afternoon, and the Adjutant was determined to get back in time for polo ; but the people were maddening ; everyone seemed to turn his back and close his ears for the Adjutant's special benefit. His best parade-ground voice was like a whisper here. He was simply disregarded, and became very angry, spurring his pony through the crowd, and using chosen epithets with discrimination.

The worst offender was a tall, bent old man, who shuffled and shambled down the middle of the road like a camel, and the Adjutant gave him the start of his life as he brushed past and asked him whether he had put his

¹ Mali = Gardener.

foot in his ear, that he could not hear a saheb. As he passed on, he did not see the old man look up, nor hear what he mumbled in his red beard.

The Adjutant played four good chukkers, followed by a cheery evening at the Club and a guest-night in Mess. So he was full of good humour as he passed the sentry on his gate, the watchman by the stables, and the orderly on the veranda; and, as he went to bed, it is unlikely that he remembered the old man whom he had nearly knocked over in the bazaar.

There were three other officers in the bungalow, a full guard on the gate, and the syces¹ slept in the stables.

But next morning the Adjutant's two polo ponies were not there. They had been abstracted from a stable of eight, and must have been led right over the sleeping syces and past the veranda, where the Adjutant was sleeping within a yard of the path. But gone they were, and the only evidence of the manner of their going was a large gap in the mud wall of the compound some thirty yards from the gate and the guard.

The Adjutant sacked the chowkidar,² and harangued the guard; the Political Agent poured out emissaries like water; mounted police wore their mounts thin. But not a word was heard of the missing ponies for a month.

Then—under exactly the same conditions—they were replaced . . . with the humble thanks of Saleem for a loan most kind to an old man who no longer carried his feet in his ears.

The Adjutant might laugh over his lesson in manners from Saleem in the character of humorist, since, though he had lost a month's polo, he had saved a month's feed. But the Colonel, to the best of his knowledge, had done nothing to deserve the tragedy of a fortnight later.

A keen shikari was the Colonel, with a special ambition—to shoot an Oorial in the hills west of Nabbu.

¹ Syce = Groom.

² Chowkidar = Watchman.

This was not only a difficult feat, but an unpopular one with the Political Agent, as involving pickets and a big bandobast.¹ But the Colonel had ordered a new Mannlicher for this specific purpose, and go he would. So he spent a week crawling over hot red rocks and up steep khuds² without even getting a sight of this rare and elusive sheep. At night he slept in a little tent, just big enough to hold one man at full length; his orderly slept across the entrance, and the servants behind the tent, while there was a cordon of pickets all round it.

Yet, on the eighth morning, the Colonel's new Mannlicher, with a hundred rounds, was missing from its case, which had served the Colonel as a bolster for the night. As a finishing touch, on the ninth morning a fine Oorial was found laid at the orderly's side; but the rifle was not returned.

Saleem again, of course!

This ghostly gift of insinuating himself silently into any place in the dark—a gift not uncommon among Pathan thieves, who can clear a room out while the occupant sleeps—was possessed to an uncanny extent by Saleem, as the following event will show.

In Nabbu bazaar there lived an old Hindu bannia, Panna Lal by name, who had acquired great wealth by selling grain at famine prices across the border, and by lending out the capital so gained at exorbitant rates to the poor and needy. A fat, bearded old miser this—pale and oily, and hard as stone, with interests in every corner of the bazaar, and house property in most of the streets.

This old man used to boast that he could not be robbed, and with reason. For one thing, he had built him a house like a fortress—with granary below, and living-rooms above, connected by a narrow stair that was always ted and guarded. The Treasury itself was hardly more

¹ Bandobast = Arrangement.

² Khud = Precipice.

secure. Also, he had in his pay a band of spies and armed bravoës, who slept under the high wall of his courtyard at the back of the house. And, thirdly, he had so many irons in the fire that it was more than possible that the spoils of raids on the premises of others found their way into his hands.

At any rate, he had led a life of quiet villainy unmolested for thirty years, when he received a message to the effect that Saleem would visit him on a certain night—the night, as it happened, before the despatch of the monthly bundle of thousand-rupee notes to a brother bannia in Rawal Pindi.

Panna Lal laughed at this message, but nevertheless took special precautions. He put a new lock on his gate, and strengthened his shutters; he ordered all his men to keep awake throughout the night, and tied up four dogs in such a way that they would find sleep impossible. Then he shut himself in his little upper room, with his babu lying across the door outside.

All was quiet till about 2 A.M., when a regular uproar arose outside; dogs barked; people shouted; and a couple of shots were fired. Then a man rushed up hot-foot to say that some one miraculously tall had been seen climbing over the wall of the compound on to the roof of an outhouse in the courtyard; the watchers had immediately opened fire, and it was certain that they had hit their man, for they had all heard him fall on the other side. He would assuredly be found dead next morning, and the Sircar would disburse five hundred rupees as reward.

Saleem, of course !

The merchant rubbed his hands and composed himself for sleep, while the babu outside rolled over and snored.

But at three o'clock Panna Lal was awakened with a shake of the shoulder, and looked up drowsily to see a tall figure, darkly clad, bending over him, and holding

an obviously adequate knife to his throat. He is reticent as to what transpired afterwards, but it is a fact that the monthly bundle of thousand-rupee notes was not despatched as usual, while for subsequent months a goodly percentage was always detached and found its way into the grimy hands of the Superintendent's fifteen-rupee mali—and thence, who knows ?

The strategy had been quite simple ; Saleem had instructed a man to go along the wall and draw the fire, while he himself, safely ensconced in a loft since three o'clock in the afternoon, slipped down during the alarm and followed the bannia's messenger upstairs, finally hiding in the veranda.

Then, after an interval, he had gagged the sleeping babu and walked in.

But the cream of the joke was his exit next morning, when he personally escorted Panna Lal outside, dressed in the clothes of that same babu, and wearing over his head the very orange blanket which the babu invariably used for his morning peregrination.

So Saleem passed for a babu, while Panna Lal tried to smile.

CHAPTER III

To err is human, and even the greatest strategist makes a false move sooner or later. So it was with Saleem. He counted too much on the stupefying effect of New Year's Eve festivities.

He had a daring abduction in hand—the snatching of a rich and a stout bannia from the bosom of his family in the very confines of Nabbu bazaar, with a view to subsequent ransom. As the bannia never left his house, being too stout for exercise, it was obvious that the matter could not be carried through single-handed, and Saleem had mobilised his whole company, with the exception of

the mali, who had been told off to arrange the flowers for the big dance at the Club. Saleem must have had this dance in mind when he laid his plans, for it was to be a notable affair, involving the whole garrison—Political Agent, Superintendent of Police, Colonel and Adjutant included.

Meanwhile he had arranged that the Political Agent should receive unimpeachable evidence of his (Saleem's) presence in Thal, many miles away, on the eventful day.

The dance was a splendid success, the mali's roses vying with the scarlet mess-coats of the infantry in making colour; the regimental band excelled itself, and the climax of glad sound was reached when all joined hands in the middle of the room and sent up their pæan to the newborn year. Again and again they must have it—the 'Auld Lang Syne' of good comradeship. What matter a few explosions in the bazaar? Fire-works probably. They must dance round in full song; they must work their united arms like pump-handles, and finally climb tables before they fall exhausted.

Partners were still babbling of vocal success when the Political Agent was summoned outside, and was shortly followed by the Colonel, the Adjutant, and the D.S.P.¹ The room was beginning to look empty, and subalterns were practising self-effacement in corners when the luckless Jones, whose weekly duty it was with the Cavalry Mobile Column, was called to leave blue eyes and fair hair for the chilly night outside.

'That you, Jones? Right. Here are your orders. Fifty sabres to proceed under a British officer to Takhti Khel to-night—you are the British officer. On arrival to reconnoitre in the direction of Jani Khel. Troops detailed should be prepared to remain out indefinitely. Read the rest carefully, and get busy. It's Saleem again.'

Within half an hour of that brutal order fifty men were

¹ D.S.P. = District Superintendent of Police.

rattling down the Takhti Khel road in the dark, led by a gallant British officer who was wishing that he had said good-bye to Enid, and wondering whether he had brought his pipe. Jones was not enthusiastic over Saleem.

Meanwhile Nabbu City had been treated to a rare orgy of explosion. Saleem's men had got their bannia wedged in a doorway, when some one let off a muzzle-loader. Firing had at once become general, and the police had arrived hot-foot. The house was surrounded and the streets blocked, with the result that the gang had had to leave their unwilling guest, and take to the walls.

Then the incredible had occurred; Saleem had been hit in the leg with a slug, and had bled and limped like an ordinary mortal.

Being a big man, he was only got away with difficulty, and instead of three days' start the gang had about five minutes.

They found the route to the nearer hills closed to them, and had to make for Takhti Khel ford, twelve miles away.

The dark night served them. Naturally they did not take the main road, but cut across the maidan. Yet it was slow going, for Saleem could only just hobble, and they would have their work cut out in making the ford before dawn, with less than five hours of dark to do it in. Make it they must, for they had heard the cavalry rattling down the road ahead of them, and could not turn back, because the villagers would be out for them. Certainly New Year's Eve was not Saleem's lucky night.

They passed Jones's pickets about half an hour before dawn, just as Jones was giving the order to tighten girths. There was a guard on the ford, but they slipped past in the darkness, and would have gone through without raising an alarm had not Saleem stumbled in the water.

Then the pace became unpleasantly hot. With the sounds of jingling and fussing behind them, they cut

right-handed up the river bank for the nearest hills. If the worst came to the worst, they knew of a good cave at the foot of the hills—good so long as they were not seen entering it.

On they struggled in the dark, feeling their way by the river bank over treacherous nullahs, and boulders, and clogging sand, while behind them they heard the order to mount, followed by the clatter of horses on the shingle and through the ford.

Soon a patrol passed within twenty yards of them as they lay in a nullah, and they could hear the horses snort as they plunged down and up again.

They gave the patrol five minutes, and then went on. Just as the first flush of dawn shed its dim light, they gained the cave . . . a great hole, where the river had eaten away the ground under the hill. For the first time in his career the old border fox had gone to ground.

When the sun peeped over the horizon, Saleem's son, posted at a cranny at the cave's mouth, saw as ominous a sight as morning could show to fugitives. The plain was dotted with men and horses; a group of led horses under the hill a quarter of a mile away; still farther, another; dismounted men scaling the hill behind them; pickets betrayed by the flash of rifles above. So their rear was already blocked.

In front, three advanced posts, also dismounted, while another held the far bank of the river. There was movement, too, in a nullah beyond the advanced posts . . . more horses . . . and men extended out in the plain. What was that little group? A saheb—he could tell that from the set of the puggaree—talking to some of the villagers, who were pointing . . . of course they would know of the cave. He dropped down inside to give his news.

CHAPTER IV

Meanwhile Jones was congratulating himself. He had pushed forward his patrols in the approved style, and had occupied the tactical points in the hills, making certain that the gang had not slipped through. Then he had summoned the villagers, who had indicated the cave, and he himself had seen a tell-tale glimmer of white, which had disappeared on the instant. So the gang was located, the horses under cover, and the men extended without a casualty . . . and his pipe was safe in an inner pocket !

Jones saw a 'Mention' in this at the least . . . possibly a Military Cross . . . why not—for Saleem ?

He had just given the order for his encircling movement to begin when a yellow envelope was handed to him. It was an express telegram from Brigade, and it read :

'Report results of reconnaissance as early as possible. Stop.'

Jones immediately scribbled his reply :

'Gang located in cave one mile due west of Takhti Khel. Stop. Am engaged in encircling movement. Stop.'

Then the advance proceeded. Within two hundred yards of the cave the enemy opened fire on the line, with the result that two men were hit, and Jones sat down hurriedly as a bullet struck a rock at his feet with a crack and a whirr. The dismounted men replied with a lively volley, and began to advance by short rushes under cover of rocks. At about a hundred and fifty yards from the cave, where the ground was sandy and dead level, three more men were hit, and it began to look as if Saleem's capture would be costly. Jones was consulting his jemadar, who advised a surprise from the rear with a

holding attack in front, when a second envelope was brought to him. It said :

‘Do not commit your troops, but consolidate position, paying special attention to possible exits in rear. Stop. Await arrival of O.C. 59th Lancers, and Political Agent. Stop.’

Jones’s comment was short and expressive as the vision of the Military Cross faded and became a pat on the back from the General. Why in the world couldn’t they leave things to the fellow on the spot ?

However, orders were orders, and the advance ceased. The line took cover in a nullah, and a scout was posted in the village to announce the approach of the powers. So the long hours passed under the hot sun, enlivened only by a crack from the cave whenever a man moved.

At last, about three o’clock, red tabs brightened the drab dust of Takhti Khel, and, after a council of war, the jemadar’s plan was adopted, and he was sent on a long détour to get in rear of the cave.

By five o’clock all was in readiness, and the attack was launched in the face of determined and very accurate fire from the cave, during which the Colonel was heard to say that he distinguished the note of his Mannlicher.

The resistance was extraordinary, several more men being hit, and it is doubtful whether the attack could have succeeded, had not the jemadar made a magnificent rush across the open and taken up a commanding position directly over the cave itself. From here they had the satisfaction of seeing two of the gang tumble loose and inert into the dim hole. But there was still an invisible marksman with an accurate eye, and the jemadar was hit in the arm.

Then he had a brilliant idea, and ordered his men to roll rocks into the hole. Boulder after boulder was sent crashing down . . . firing ceased.

When finally the attack had been pushed home, and the General and the Colonel and the Adjutant and the Political Agent had walked up, it was almost dark. But there lingered just enough light for them to see the tumbled bodies of six men and a lad, sprawling among the rocks in the attitudes of death, and blood-stained. One of them was a man of vast stature, with a wild red beard, and he it was who was literally drenched with blood, his head lying under the shadow of a jagged piece of rock. Saleem at last !

No one could be blamed for missing, in the semi-darkness, a flicker of an eyelid beneath that same rock.

It was too late to arrange for burial, and nothing could happen in the night ; so Jones was left on guard with a strong picket, just in case of an attempt to steal the bodies, and an outer cordon of jubilant villagers.

The great ones departed to their dinner in Nabbu, and the silence of night brooded over the dark plain, broken only by the rustle of the river.

There was not a sound in the cave. . . . But when they looked inside next morning, Saleem had gone.

THE FACE OF BRONZE

JOHN SANDERSON belonged to the Survey Department of the Government of India. At the time of this history he was thirty years of age—a sallow young man, with untidy light hair, a long, clever, clean-shaven face, and the earnest grey eyes of a dreamer. He was a member of a solitary service, which suited his character, and though for months he went without sight of another white face the deprivation did not worry him. He loved his work, with all the spirit of an explorer; had plenty of imagination; a quiet love of adventure; and a great stock of sleepy dreams. It was a lonely temperament—with just a latent strain of morbidity. He had made few men friends at Cambridge, and it was said of him that he would run a mile to avoid a woman.

In India his habitual abstraction intensified. He grew to depend entirely on himself for companionship. He had a few book friends and loved beautiful things, so long as they were inanimate. He had only been home on leave once, and had spent the whole time intervening between two visits to his mother in walking about the North of Scotland by himself. He always loved hills.

On his return from leave he was given a job after his own heart; he was sent to make certain verifications on the Durand Line. It was ticklish work, and he was more than once sniped at, because he would insist on avoiding his escort. Nevertheless he was extremely happy in

those barren hills. Moreover he was just the very man to find what he did find there.

It happened quite by accident. He had been out late, and had only an hour in which to walk back to his little camp. The obvious course was to call up his escort, which was playing a game of chance on the top of a hill, and to take the rough path by which he had come. Being Sanderson, however, he completely forgot the existence of his escort, and decided to take a short cut.

His way led down the steep, stony bed of a dry nullah. He scrambled down with difficulty, using one or two stunted bushes to help him until he got half-way down. Then a bush came bodily away, and he fell heavily about ten feet, dislodging a small avalanche of stones. The fall was very sudden and it gave him a considerable shock, so that he sat for some time, looking vaguely round him. Then, among the stones, his eye noted an object whose texture was not that of a stone. It was smooth, of a greenish colour, and had a metallic look—whereas the stones were rough and red. He shifted his position and picked the thing up. Then he had a surprise.

He looked at it for a long time, turning it over and over. It was a very perfect thing—the head of a woman in bronze. True, it had been broken or twisted off at the neck, but the face was uninjured. The features were beautiful—straight eyebrows, straight nose, finely moulded chin; but he did not stare at the features. The extraordinary impression of life in the face held him. Cast in bronze as it was, and coated over with the green of age, he had a feeling that it lived. He could see the bloom on the cheeks, which were soft and rounded; he could look into the eyes; and the soft sweet lips were just about to smile. Sanderson sat there an hour, forgetful of everything—a lonely figure among the rocks, in the shadow made by the setting sun. Yet it was only a little bronze face—half life-size.

He took it home carefully, wrapped in his handkerchief. At the very outset he risked his life for it, since it was unhealthy to be out after dark in those parts without an escort. He merely toyed with his roast chakor at dinner. Instead of recording the results of the day, he sat in a deck-chair in the ill-lit tent, an empty pipe twirling in his mouth, and gazed and dreamed. It would not be too much to say that he fell in love with his prize. For him the face lived ; he saw it in dreams—alive.

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Thereafter Sanderson abandoned himself completely to the face of bronze. His work he got through automatically, nor did he shirk any of it. For the rest, he concentrated the whole of his dreamy and somewhat morbid nature on the face. He would sit looking at it for hours on end—imbuing it with life, making stories about it, worshipping it. It seemed to mesmerize him ; he did not doubt its power over him, nor did he try to fight the influence, but surrendered his mind to it.

He knew it was Greek ; no other nation could have produced so magical a thing. Greek coins had been found from time to time in the ruins of Akra, and little Greek statues around Peshawar and the Khyber—relics of the days of Alexander and his generals. But this was a thing apart ; he looked on it as a treasure reserved for him—the most beautiful face in the world.

He revisited the spot where he had found it, and made a very careful search ; but he could not find the missing portion. There was not a trace of a ruin—just a brown, bare hill-top, a slash of a nullah in the side, and a trickling stream below. He soon gave up looking for the history of the face ; it was sufficient in itself—more than sufficient. A friend might have laughed him out of his intense concentration, inducing a tardy sense of proportion. But he was entirely on his own—a day's march from the nearest outpost.

It was after he had returned from the search in the nullah that the first dream came—rather, the first connected dream—for the face itself had appeared to him nightly. It is not proposed to explain the dream ; psychology may hint that it was a figment born of an overworked imagination. It is simply given as a fact—for what it is worth.

He saw the interior of a rough tent—an affair of two uprights, cross-pole, and sloping sides. It was but dimly lit by a wick floating in a saucer of earthenware. On one side was some sort of a rough couch, with tumbled rugs and skins on it ; there were skins on the floor too, which otherwise was bare. Behind the couch, in the corner, was a pile of indistinct objects, in which metal glinted. The flap of the tent was down.

There was a man in the tent—a man with curly, dark hair, clad in a tunic of some dark material. His legs were bare almost to the hips, and they looked long and shapely. His face was invisible because he was lying at full length on the ground with his head between his hands, looking down as if he were reading. Altogether, Sanderson had an impression of a handsome, well-built youth. More he could not gather because he never saw the face. The youth was lying between the entrance and the light—face to the light and back to the entrance. He never moved. A long time passed before the tent-flap stirred and some one came silently in, and stood in the shadow, looking down on the youth as he lay. Sanderson knew rather than saw that the figure was a woman, wrapped in a dark cloak. . . . Then he awoke.

He had the impression of an actual experience rather than of a dream. This experience was consecutive and intensely vivid. It actually happened. He saw exactly the same thing several nights running, and brooded over it all day. The scene never altered ; the youth never moved nor showed his face. Sanderson always awoke with the shadowy figure of the visitor before his eyes,

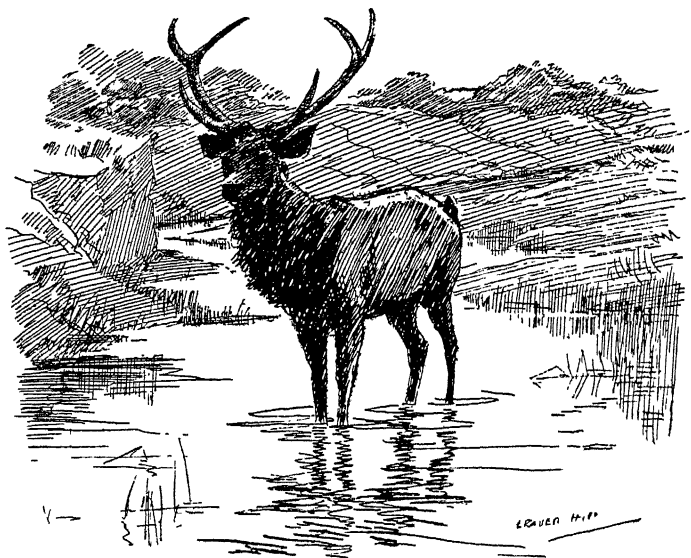
and with a sense of some cruel thing impending. Then one night he knew more.

The beginning was the same—the dark tent and its shadowy corners; the lissom figure on the ground; the stirring of the tent-flap; the soundless entrance; the waiting figure. But this time the figure moved, as if gathering strength. The right arm was raised, throwing a great bar of shadow across the tent. But the youth never looked up. Then came a swooping movement; something glittered in the hand of the woman, and she stooped and struck the youth between the shoulders. His head fell forward and lay still; his hands dropped; he was dead.

The woman glided swiftly forward and picked up what lay between the youth and the light. It was a head and shoulders of bronze—half life-size. She raised it above her head and fled from the tent into the darkness. Then she threw it far away . . . down . . . and herself fell huddled to the ground.

Sanderson awoke in terror—a wild fear which was akin to madness. He had only one idea—to get away; back to men and women and the sound of laughter and the welcome of little lighted shops in busy streets. He could not be alone again, nor chance seeing again what he had seen. In that last act he had been no mere spectator. In some strange way he had lived the scene, powerless to avert the horror which he felt. . . . His face of bronze—he could never look upon it again. He dare not see it again. It would bring back the silence—the waiting—the knowledge. He would cover it up and bury it in the place whence it came. Then he might have peace. . . .

With eyes averted, he opened the box in which he had put his treasure. His hand felt for it. Then he gave a cry of surprise—the head of bronze was not there.



‘He stopped to look back’

A PHILOSOPHER STAG

CHAPTER I

INDIA is happy in her children, the deer, for they are many. Perhaps Ram Singh, whose little fields lie alongside the jungle, and who spends his nights watching for these same children, would not endorse the sentiment; but, after all, Ram Singh is in the minority, and even he should not be utterly thankless, for he has the venison.

They all have their characteristics: nobility for the Hangul of Kashmir, greater brother of the Red Deer; charm for the Cheetal, with his spotted hide and his tapering horns; cheek for the little autumn-coated Khaker, who barks like a dog; pride for the Gond of the swamps and long grass, with antlers branching like an

oak. But the familiar Sambar of wood and hill has a rugged honesty all his own ; he is the quiet friend of the woods, big and dark and beautiful.

‘Rusa Aristotelis’ they call him in Natural History, surely because he, too, is something of a philosopher ; shy, but trustful ; slow to stir, and apt to blunder when he gets up, like the philosopher at the tea-table ; a trifle absent-minded ; contented, with simple tastes. What more would you have ?

Hear, then, the story of a philosopher stag. He was born in the forests of Nepal, near the banks of the Sarda river, of a strong, hardy breed. In childhood he was familiar with the utterly wild forests, where man was unknown and elephants brought no fear ; when he only owned as enemies the tiger, the leopard, and the destroying red dog, which foes his mother, soft-eyed and watchful for him, taught him to shun. He grew quickly, and early found his strength and speed, while he carried the long brow-points of the fighter ; though he fought seldom, among his own kind he was destined for high place. What pride he took in those horns, as year by year he made a higher score on the tree-trunks, and felt his crown more pleasantly heavy. Strong horns they were, thick at the base, gnarled like the Sal trees among which he fed—veritable trunks themselves, and of the dark colour of trunks, cleft near the top in two strong branches, sharp and light-coloured at the tips ; and between the horns was a noble span, fully a yard inside the bend. Such did he grow to be in his prime, free of the woodland and the hill-sides, and of the shady drinking-places by the rivers, while yearly he mated his large-eyed does.

He was big in body, of a slaty colour, and with long wiry hair on throat and neck, like a mane upside down ; he had soft, big ears, light-hued inside, and deep eye-pits for eyes like dark woodland pools.

His daily course seldom changed. The daytime he

spent in the foot-hills, and slept for most of the time in a warm baithak¹ among the leaves and grass under the tall trees of a rounded hill-top; then, when the sun was setting, he would wander down to the river and the level places for food and drink, with a wary eye open for his enemies. All night he would move feeding—on nuts, berries, leaves, grass, according to season—then at dawn he would steal through the mists to his high perch again. In their season he had his little family of does to do him honour; in youth, too, he had wandered with other stags of his age; but dignity brought solitude, and he spent his latter years alone.

He might have stayed in deep Nepal all his days had he not been disturbed in old age by a tiger beat, involving a hundred elephants, and gongs, and strange noises, and been driven incontinently from his ancient and rightful home. He resented this intrusion deeply, for he could hardly know that anxiety to make sure of the tiger had saved him a bullet in the shoulder at twenty yards.

So he snorted loudly, with the sharp note of a horn, rushed through the woods till he came to the river, and splashed through deep water to the other side. Then, philosopher that he was, he stopped to look back.

Noises everywhere! No place for him.

He walked slowly into the Sal wood, and began to wander westwards. For the first time he was on British soil.

CHAPTER II

The spirit of unrest was in him, and he travelled a long way, more than a day's journey from Nepal. He found the jungle thinner and less apt to impede the horns; it was homely, sunny stuff, with fair feeding and enough water, and he was tired, so he delayed his return.

On the second evening he made a delightful discovery.

¹ Baithak = Form, resting-place.

He had walked a little south, and had left the tall trees for a country of golden grass and brown bushes, where cheetal were feeding, and some smaller stags of his own kind. Absent-mindedly he followed the latter in the dusk till they came on an open space, stretching as far as the eye could see—fresh and green. The others started browsing, and he took a nibble or two . . . a new taste, utterly delightful, and soft to yellowing old teeth; and apparently an inexhaustible supply. He spent the night in this pleasant place, and lay up near it in the grass for the day. Truly the new country contained things undreamed of.

The next night he returned with the eagerness of a gourmet to his new pastures, and wandered a little farther afield without taking much note of a queer structure which stood up like an overburdened tree some distance from the jungle.

Suddenly a deafening roar made him jump a yard in the air; there was a blinding flash as if the sun had fallen in the night; and his coat was stung in several places. With his usual alarm signal, he made like a meteor for the woods, and did not stop till he had covered half a mile.

Meanwhile, old Ram Singh gathered up his box of slugs, his powder flask, and his muzzle-loader, and climbed wearily down from his perch. A pest on the jungle that an old man should lose his sleep of nights; twenty rupees worth of young wheat ruined, and no venison!

But he rather enjoyed telling his wife about the monster he had shot at. The sound and the scramble had come from no mamuli janwar.¹ He was almost inclined to make it an elephant and be done with it.

Scared as he had been, the great stag could not forget the lure of the green food. If instinct bade him return east, appetite drew him west, and west he went. Again he travelled farther than he had intended, for he got into

¹ Mamuli janwar = Ordinary animal.

a patch of jungle where men were sawing wood, with a noise remarkably like a leopard's song, and had to gallop on, much disturbed by the new portent.

But always he found the same green food at the jungle's edge, and, like Lotus, it made him forget.

Perhaps the richness of his new diet made him a trifle fat and slack. At any rate he was nearly destroyed one day in a way most terrible of all for a child of the wild . . . by fire.

There were evil-minded men in this new country, and their way of avenging a fancied wrong was to set alight thousands of acres of jungle, thus destroying all green things, and birds, with many of the beasts and most of their young. The ordinary yearly fires, lit in definite places for the benefit of the grass, were known to the deer, who had an easy line of escape from the wave of flame. But this was different—a devilish scheme.

One quiet evening, at drinking time, six men stole into the jungle at points far apart—men with dark hair and dark faces, low-caste and furtive. As the evening breeze began to sigh through the trees, these men knelt down at their various points, and soon before each of them there was a little curl of smoke in the grass; then a tongue of flame lit their faces for an instant before they fled.

Within five minutes the jungle was alight at six points, and peace was no more. Every animal looked up and sniffed the breeze; then started for the hills. But suddenly they hesitated—there was more smoke ahead. Now they stamped and fidgeted, ill at ease, while the birds flew twittering from tree to tree above them; finally they stampeded wildly as the roar of the fire came to them. Many perished; many lost their young, and their own lives in looking for them; only the lucky lived in that mad, aimless, cruel stampede. There were startled eyes and wild cries, and crashings through the trees, while

the lighters of the fires crouched round the little fires that are for honest men, and laughed.

The old stag was sitting in the grass when he caught the smell, and had hardly struggled to his feet when a wave of flame behind him smote and crumpled the trees. He dashed forward at a gallop, saw another line of flame to his right, swerved, and crashed headlong into a hidden nullah with water in it. He had lost his head completely, for all his philosophy, and would certainly have been burned to death or suffocated if the banks of the nullah had not been deep and absolutely sheer. He was forced to splash, at the gallop, through the water in its bed to escape what he looked on ungratefully as a prison, until he emerged on to a rocky beach, free of undergrowth, leading to freedom.

He did not stop to breathe the cool, clean air, but galloped on and on into the west, mile after mile, until his breath gave, and he was forced to sink panting to the ground. For days he pursued his course at the foot of the hills, crossing rivers and gullies and roads, passing little villages, with fresh terrors of fire in them, and green fields where he dared not stop to eat.

He was only pulled up in his long flight because the jungle seemed suddenly to end, and he had to retrace his steps a little. Then at last he rested.

CHAPTER III

He had come to a strip of jungle, stretching like a finger from the hills, and lining both banks of a clear, bubbling stream. On either side mustard fields marched with the forest, yellow below the blue backs of the hills. The place had a new atmosphere—free from alarm. There would be good feeding in the woods from favourite trees, and a carpet of soft moss beneath them. Here was the ideal resting-place, the Eutopia of age . . . a place wherein

he could end his days in peace, feeding on the threshold of home, drinking his own waters undisturbed. Here the evening breeze called him to stay and rest the burden of his horns, till one day he would no more be able to rise and wind his alarm, but would wait patiently for the tiger to spring and deal the death-blow, swift and merciful.

The home he chose was a little ruined garden, set in the midst of the forest on the bank of the stream. Long ago a man had tilled it, and still the bright oranges swung in the green leaves, and the little red plums gave feasting to the birds. Green parrots rioted above, while the peacock and the jungle fowl shared the ground below; and there was naught to break the peace or mar the beauty. Here the old stag lay down, and many days he brooded in the nest he had formed, his great horns merged with the low branches of the tree that gave him shade, while his soft ears flapped gently to and fro. In the evening he would struggle slowly to his feet and walk through the trees to the stream-bank, and, when the sun set in gold, his great form would stand out magnificently as he raised his head towards the hills.

First he would sip lightly—look up again—drink deep to the fill; then once more raise his proud head, and so stand till the dark came over him.

So he lived his last days, till one evening the river called and he could not rise; his legs were as water and his head heavy. Twice he essayed to get up, and then, as if he knew that his time had come, lifted his soft eyes to the low sun, gazed a moment, and settled for the long rest.

Then the dark came on.

ARMS AND A BRAHMAN

CHAPTER I

HIS full name was Raghavendra Rao, or something equally lengthy, but to me he was always 'Rao.' When first I set eyes on him he was insinuating a pay-bill on to my blotting-pad with a deprecating request for signature, and the intelligence that he was the new pay-clerk.

A pay-clerk always commands my respect, for he needs must interpret those mysterious volumes, the 'Civil Service Regulations,' side by side with the cryptic commentaries of that Delphic Oracle of India, the Accountant-General—the unseen official who lays a ghostly finger on the pulse of our pay. To be the qualified satellite of this deity a man must be something of a diplomat, endowed with tact and patience, and a measure of inspiration. But from the first Rao showed signs, in addition to these gifts, of a strong, soaring imagination. Whereas his predecessor had had a fatal facility for reduction of an already exiguous pay by digging out hitherto undiscovered arrears on the debit side, Rao had a positive genius for increasing credit and for making one appear a tolerably rich man. I should have liked to make him Accountant-General for services rendered.

To all outward appearance he was a typical young Brahman; the clean-shaven face, the shrewd eyes, the smooth fair skin, and the dot of the caste-mark on the forehead were to be met in infinite repetition on bicycles

any morning at ten o'clock between the office and the town. Like the rest, he wore a neat white puggaree and a sober black coat, while his nether limbs were clothed in a long skirt-like affair of white cotton. Doubtless he shared the principles and prejudices of his caste—Brahman of the South and exclusive beyond description—and the shadow of an 'untouchable'¹ over his food would have cost him an uneaten meal. One might have foretold that Rao would grow old in office service; that finally he would intrigue himself into the post of chief clerk or of sub-registrar, when he would abjure hockey and put on weight until his bicycle refused to carry him. Then he would retire on a pension to air his dignity in the public park with his nose in a book, as nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand of them do. So one might reasonably have prophesied, but one would have been wrong.

Rao was the thousandth man, and I personally put down his subsequent success in deserting the beaten track entirely to that strain of optimism which blossomed in his early interpretations of the Accountant-General. To have found real inspiration at such a source argues Rao a very original babu—a *rara avis* indeed.

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The office and pay-bills were very far away that sunny afternoon in Marseilles three years later. I was sitting outside the Grand Café and quaffing iced beer, while I studied the crowds passing from the vieux port, with its network of rigging, over the cobble-stones and up the Cannebière. All Europe, with a sprinkling of Africa and of Asia, seemed to be abroad in the street—blue uniforms and khaki; sailors and fishermen; florid ladies of Provence jostling burly fishwives at the shop windows. Italy, Corsica, Algeria, Spain, India—all were contributing

¹ 'Untouchable' = Anyone whose contact defiles a Brahman.

to that sea of faces, and it would have been hard to find an allied or a neutral nation unrepresented.

The head-gears held my attention for the moment; I had seen in rapid succession two swagger Punjabi puggarees, a Highlander's bonnet, an Algerian fez, and a French sailor's blue cap with its red ball atop, and was reflecting on the psychology of human head-wear, when I saw approaching me the most amazing phenomenon of all. It was bobbing up and down in the crowd like a mauve-brown mushroom—a wide-brimmed, shady thing of felt—and try as I would I could not place it. The brim flopped downwards; the nearest I could get to it was a kind of cross between a Ghorka's service hat and the traditional head-gear of the American cowboy; but I felt that my diagnosis was weak, for it had neither the smartness of the one nor the insouciance of the other. The face beneath would have helped, but the wearer was evidently short, and was obscured at the moment of passing by a lady of large proportions struggling with a family. However, I refused to be beaten by a hat, and, finishing my beer, gave chase.

It is as hard to hurry up the Cannebière at 4 P.M. as it is to pierce a football crowd, and the hat had a fair start; it was all I could do to keep it in view, and I felt I was in luck when it stopped at the tram terminus. Here the crowd was stationary as well as dense, and I had a struggle, my ardour being whetted by that unmistakable sound—the cry of a bewildered babu in the throes of explanation:

‘But I tell you, man, that I am of camp: the name has for the moment escaped, but it is the English camp for residence of soldiers. Yes, I am almost soldier—military clerk of Supply and Transport, but uniform not yet available from department concerned. Camp, man! Do you not know what is camp, with the Great European War at gates? You are no good, I tell you, for responsible post.’

The voice rose almost to a shriek, while, beneath the mushroom hat, arms signalled wildly in the face of an astonished Provencal tram-conductor. Now where in the world had I heard that voice ?

Even as I asked myself the question, the speaker gave a gesture of despair and, literally wringing his hands, turned to look for help ; something in the gesture recalled a passage of arms over a mislaid document, and I recognised the whilom pay-clerk with the soaring imagination. It was Rao in the flesh.

The sudden appearance of a knight in armour at the tram terminus could not have surprised me more. Gone were the neat puggaree and sober coat, to be replaced by that monstrous mushroom and a sagging tunic of khaki, obviously borrowed, while the nether limbs were now decked in slacks which fell in folds on to untidy brown boots. Spectacles contradicted the would-be martial air of an attenuated moustache, and the caste-mark had apparently gone for ever.

Then Rao saw me. As the sun bursts out after an April shower, the smile burst and chased away the worry on his round face. I had never seen a Brahman smile like that ; there was no reserve, nothing withheld ; it was a smile without discretion—the real article,—and it spoke for itself. Rao had travelled a long way—farther than the mere journey from Madras to Marseilles—for he had left behind his Brahmanic reserve. But how ?

‘Sir, your poor humble servant is dumb, saying what have I done that I should receive this honour ? I was lonely sheep, strayed from sheep-flock among foxes, until I saw your honour’s benign countenance. Now all will be well, I say. I hope your honour is in the best of health.’

I thanked him, and returned the compliment ; then elicited his destination, and discovered that there would be no tram to La Valentine for ten minutes—so we sat down outside a café.

‘ Well, Rao,’ I began, ‘ what brings you here ? And where did you get your hat ? I have never seen one exactly like it.’

Rao fondled the article in question.

‘ Sir, you find me in anomalous position. I am neither fowl nor good red fish, doctors saying eyes were too weak for full military career. So I became Supply and Transport babu, attached to headquarters, thinking half a bread better than nothing. Borrowing uniform from second clerk, I came into town to procure military hat, and have this day found this semi-military at seven francs fifty in French window. Sir, tell me, will it do ?’

I saw that he was proud of it—besides, I owed something to the hat—and assented, without realising how this hat would defy time and army regulations throughout a campaign ; but I anticipate.

‘ What made you come over, Rao ? What about the office ? Did any of the others get away ?’

Rao became confidential :

‘ Sir, you see in me sole representative of the office. When tidings of great war came, I said to myself : “ Rao, what do you here ? While others are shedding blood for King, will you be making pay-bills for thankless head clerk ? ” No, sir, I chose King and blood, going to Army office in Madras at personal expense and offering services in any capacity. So I was made clerk on forty rupees a month.’

‘ Weren’t they sorry to lose you ?’ I asked.

‘ Sir, God knows I am innocent humble clerk. The head clerk, whom your honour may remember, was a proud, over-strapping fellow. He said that I had made much trouble with neglecting item of deduction of Income Tax in officers’ pay-bills, officers being now at war and not available for adjustment. I replied that I was but humbly serving superiors and avoiding messy bothers. On day of great war, he said he would report me. So I

flipped my fingers in his face. Your honour will forgive humble, well-meaning clerk ? ’

‘ Your subsequent conduct has to some extent mitigated the offence, Rao, and I am glad to see you,’ I answered judiciously. ‘ Can I do anything for you ? ’

‘ Sir, when I went to Madras, I said to myself, “ Rao, you will be seeing great war ; you will be hearing loud explosion, and blooding sword.” Now, sir, here I cannot blood sword ; this place is no more than Madras. I write in office, and weigh rations, and ride in tram to town as if I were Public Works babu in Madras. If you do not help me, sir, I shall never see war, and the head clerk will laugh at Rao. Sir, I want to join a regiment proceeding to battle. Let me come with you as Regiment babu.’

‘ All right, Rao ; we’ll see what can be done. Here is your tram. Come and see me in the other camp.’

The mushroom hat bowed to the ground, before it was lost in the crowd boarding the tram. I waited to see Rao flung violently into his seat as the tram started, and walked away, thinking. There were plenty of babus with the Indian Expeditionary Force, but how many high-caste Brahmans ? It meant departure from the closest code in the world—a mighty wrench, whether dictated by self-interest or patriotism. Above all it showed imagination of a high order and worthy of better things than omissions of Income Tax from pay-bills. Rao would be worth watching.

CHAPTER II

Rao got his desire somehow, and was attached to an Indian cavalry regiment, hat and all, as headquarters’ clerk, in time for those hurried moves and long periods of waiting which meant the Somme. In time he became a sort of figurehead, for his appearance was always startling, and his talk refreshing. He was invariably

optimistic in that time of disappointed hopes, and optimism is a valuable quality.

His first, and last, attempt to ride a horse earned him fame and almost lost him his hat. He achieved the mount all right, and was proceeding quietly at a walk when his optimism bubbled up and he waved his hat in the face of the old trooper, who was proof against most things, but not against Rao's hat. The old horse cantered down the road, Rao clinging to the reins, while the stirrups jumped and danced on their own; no cry came from him, but it was obvious that he was in sore distress; the hat was tilted well over his eyes, so he did not see the Brigadier riding up the road towards him. Even if he had seen, it is doubtful whether he could have diverted the patriarch of C Squadron, who stopped dead in the General's path, depositing Rao in several inches of French mud.

'What *are* you, please?' said the General.

'Sir, I am Rao, the poor clerk,' faltered the victim.

'Then, Rao the poor clerk, you had better get yourself a bicycle, and if I see you in that hat again I'll court-martial you. It's horrible.'

So Rao indented for 'bicycles, one, despatch-riders, for the use of'; but the acquisition was hardly balanced by the continual anxiety of avoiding the General. Nothing would make him give up that hat; he regarded it as a sort of mascot. He was tolerably efficient on his bicycle in billets, but when the regiment moved he had trouble with the military police for obstructing traffic, and eventually descended to a transport waggon. Seated on the boxes, bumped up and down at the will of a careless Mohammedan driver, hugging a box containing his precious typewriter, and shivering with cold, he was the most desolate object to be encountered on the whole of a long march. But he retained his spirit of optimism throughout, and had such a quaint way of describing his manifold misfortunes that he was really the regimental humorist.

His permanent position on the transport waggon led to his being made caretaker of various personal possessions—a human dump, so to speak. By far the most prominent of these articles was Smith's greyhound, a long black dog with all the instincts of an adventurer; he had so often been lost while in pursuit of hares over the fields of France that Smith finally, in desperation, handed him over to Rao, with injunctions to do his worst.

The dog got lost, of course, but not before he had made Rao regret that he had ever made that journey to Madras to make his offer of services 'in any capacity.'

As he put it himself, after a six-mile race across country, ending in a disaster over hidden barbed wire—

'Sir, God knows I am humble man, willing to serve in any capacity, even at price of all available blood. But if any man had said to me, "Rao, you will be keeper of fierce black European hound," I would have answered, "You nonsense." We were riding on road, when suddenly French hare arose in neighbouring field. Black dog sprang after hare; Rao sprang after black dog. Presently, when fainting, I saw two English soldiers holding black dog. They asked me, "Is this your dog?" I answered, "God be praised, sirs, that this is not my dog. This is the European hound of Lieutenant Smith, and I am keeping it for him." "Well," said a brutal soldier, "you're going to lose him, so you had better say good-bye." "Sir," I said, in a great anger, "you cannot take the hound of Lieutenant Smith. First you must kill me." "Well, we're going to take him, if we have to knock head off," they answered, laughing, and walked away. Sir, with eyes flashing I sprang to fight for the hound, but fell in a devilish mess of wire at my feet, and when I had overcome the wire, men and European hound were gone. Here was a nice to-do for poor clerk.'

So it came about that Rao was freed of the terrors of horse and hound.

CHAPTER III

Rao's ambition to see something of the war was finally gratified after nearly two years of remaining behind with the regimental depôt, or at headquarters in the support line. A special visit to the firing line in a quiet sector was arranged for his benefit, on one condition—that he would supplant his weird hat with an ordinary tin one.

The subsequent events were attributed by Rao entirely to the temporary sacrifice of his mascot.

It was a beautiful May morning, and Rao's spectacles flashed in the sun as he walked up the long communication trench. On arrival in the front line he asked at once, 'Where is the enemy?' and as if in answer to his query the Boche did a thing that was unusual on May mornings in those particular trenches—they let off a pip-squeak at the front line, and it exploded within a yard of the party.

When earth had been removed from eyes and ears, the Indian officer in charge looked round for Rao; Rao was lying on the ground groaning, and there was blood on his arm.

I met the stretcher returning, and looked to see who occupied it: the sight of Rao, leaning back with a soft sweet smile on his face, deprived me of speech for the moment; then, 'What on earth have you been doing, Rao? Been in the barbed wire again?' was all I could think of.

'Sir, I am a happy man this day,' answered the invalid. 'I have shed blood for King. No more can head clerk laugh me.'

'Good for you, Rao. But are you bad?'

'Sir, I would rather face the German shell than keep European horse or dog. Small portion of said shell would appear to have entered left arm, causing blood, but no great damage to system.'

'Well, good luck, Rao,' I shouted, as the stretcher

moved on. The last I saw was the same beatific smile, and the glint of sun on spectacles. We missed Rao.

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A year later, at Armistice time, I happened to pass through Marseilles, and to sit in the same Grand Café where I had first marked Rao's hat. As I was reflecting on all that had come to pass since that day, I was amazed to see the selfsame hat on the other side of the road, and under it—to dispel any idea of hallucination—the unmistakable figure of that worthy man. I jumped up and shouted to him; the familiar smile spread over his features when he recognised me.

‘Well met, Rao. I thought you were back in India long ago. What are you doing here?’

‘Sir,’ he replied, ‘I have fought in great war, side by side with European armies. When war ended I said, “Rao, you cannot go back to Indian office; if you do, you will injure worthy head clerk.” So now I am in French shipping office on rupees five hundred.’

‘Congratulations,’ I gasped—‘but do you always wear that hat?’

‘Sir, that hat is sole relic of great struggle. I find it useful for attracting attention of ship captains.’ . . .

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I always said he was an original.

THE JOY OF LITTLE TOTA

CHAPTER I

LITTLE TOTA was the only son of a poor cultivator, and in the seven years of his life he had not known one moment of real joy—the sort of joy that is the heritage of children all the world over : the joy of play ; the joy of clothes ; the joy of surprise ; the joy of love ; the joy of beauty. Tota had never revelled at seeing the sun break the clouds, nor danced among the flowers at the beginning of a new day.

For one thing, he was always alone ; for another, he was weakly, and the poverty of his body reacted on his mind. He was too fragile to play with other boys, who scorned him, and he would sit alone in dark places, cleaving to the little mud house where his father lived, avoiding the sun. Nor is this surprising ; the village was set at the edge of a barren waste of rocks and rank grass, where the little fields made but poor notes of green, and the thin, blue-grey cattle strayed far for nourishment. The village itself consisted of squat huts of mud and straw—no more than shelters, devoid of any beauty or sense of home—and they bordered on a single dusty track, where scraggy fowls picked refuse with the crows, and lean dogs barked hungrily. No trees shut off the blazing sun from the mean street.

So little Tota lived his life, his thin ribs showing pitifully through rags, without a sight of beauty or the

thought that to-morrow at least would differ from to-day. Picture a large head, with sunk cheeks, big brown eyes, and a mouth which never puckered in a smile; thin brown arms and legs, and a wretched little brown body . . . and you have Tota, the poor man's son.

He was like to die—an English doctor would have



‘The village consisted of squat huts of mud and straw’

advised a complete change for him, if he were to gain a hold on life; but there were no English doctors, nor native either, near that forsaken little village. The survival of Tota lay not in the hands of doctors or nurses. But this is the true tale of how Tota did survive, and how, moreover, he knew joy.

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It was Dasehra time in Mysore—the great Hindu festival, the time of gathering and holiday, when the

highest and humblest walked the streets of the capital and worshipped their ruler ; when the country folk flocked in by the thousand, sleeping in the streets for want of lodgment, and returning to their villages full of marvels.

The chances of little Tota's seeing the Dasehra were very small, but this year it so happened that his father was engaged to drive in sheep for the market, and he decided to take Tota, mainly because there was no one to look after him at home. So it was that Tota heard the curt news :

' I am to drive sheep to Mysore to-morrow at dawn ; needs must that you go with me, bundle of uselessness. Maybe you will see the Dasehra.'

Tota assented, without much enthusiasm, for he had not learned to anticipate in his short life. The thought did not cause him to toss in his old rag-blanket that night, or squeeze his hands together for very joy ; he was a lifeless little chap.

In the morning he walked off behind his father, his ragged brown blanket over his shoulder, and a little bundle tied to his stick, weary even at starting. Down the lonely street they passed, where the curs moved sullenly out of their way ; past the village rubbish heap, where a few lank crows were already hopping, while big, dirty black and white birds, with yellow beaks, sat watchful ; at the far edge a jackal slipped silently into the lantana bushes. This was all the life they saw as they took the road.

CHAPTER II

But, once they were on the main road, life started with a vengeance. Tired as he became, Tota could not help opening his eyes, for he was seeing new things at the rate of one in five minutes on that straight and stately road between the twisted old banyan trees. It was never empty ; there were files of carts, with their smug

little white bullocks, and in them sat women and children in their brightest array—apple-green and red and gold, with bracelets that jingled; by their side walked country men, with gay turbans of pink and yellow; there were droves of donkeys and of sheep; here and there a shaven priest, clad in bright orange . . . a continuous procession, all making for Mysore along the cool and shady road.

The holiday spirit was abroad in the villages, decked with evergreen on poles, and coloured flags; pleasing wares were laid out in the little bazaars—bright handkerchiefs, silk, tinsel, and mounds of yellow sweets. At one village there was a market, and there Tota had his first real joy of surprise, for his father bought a cap for him—no mere round of calico either, but a beautiful cap of the brightest pink, with gold upon it; a cap for a *rais*¹—a cap such as he had never seen. When his father placed it on his head, no words would come, but his eyes grew larger than ever, and his poor little body trembled.

The cap was his magic cap, ushering him into a new world, in which imagination had a chance. It was more often in his hot little hands than on his head—a wonder to be twirled and admired.

At last they reached Mysore. Here, full as the high road had been, men were packed like grain in a granary, and all the quaint bazaar streets were crowded with an excited, chattering throng, hourly swelled by fresh masses from road and railway.

There was so much to admire that Tota even forgot his cap; besides, he had been given a pink shirt as well, clad in which he actually strutted by his father's side and asked questions, instead of dragging behind . . . and his father was as excited as he was, so infectious was the holiday spirit. They wandered through green gardens, full of flowering trees and bright beds of cannas—orange

¹ Rais = A large landowner.

and crimson and yellow ; they saw purple bougainvillea against white buildings ; and walked on broad red roads, whereon cars sped by without horses and left Tota gasping. In the midst of the city was the Maharajah's palace, its great golden dome catching the brightness of the sun ; they stood under it, and peeped into the big courtyard, in which there were men in bright scarlet, heralds of more wonder still.

Tota could not yet compare or put into words the immense contrast between this paradise of colour and his own drab, dirty home ; all he could do was to gape with open mouth, and revel. How he revelled !

Yet he had only begun the sights of the day.

First there was the procession of Arms, the central ceremony of the Dasehra, when the Maharajah ceased his fasting and went out to the Temple of Arms, where he prayed awhile, then mounted his state elephant and rode back to his palace, as a very god. For this pageant, they waited on the road with thousands of others, Tota clasping his father's hand, watching as in a dream. For here he saw miracles unimagined. Great elephants passed, in wonderful golden trappings, their heads painted vermilion ; troops of gay Lancers in scarlet and yellow, their pennons fluttering as they trotted ; foot soldiers marched by, a blur of red ; high officials lolled back in carriages drawn by black horses, with their coachmen and their runners in blue and yellow. Colour rioted everywhere ; no wonder the scales fell from little Tota's eyes, and the new world opened. For a day he was living as a king lives, and one such day makes a world for a child.

But here wonder was piled fast on wonder, without stint. As the sun sank, the marvellous procession turned back for the city ; far down the road he saw it, flashing and glittering ; nearer and nearer it came ; now it was close to the city gates ; he could just see the faces of the Lancers and the high howdahs of the elephants towering

behind . . . soon it would be dark. Would the colours die ?

Then they reached the city gates and were passing him . . . and the most wonderful miracle of all happened.

As the first file passed the gates, in a moment the whole city sprang into light—incredible, dazzling. The palace was picked out in it, every pillar and cornice and niche and window—a hundred thousand stars ; every roof was outlined, every house turned into a fairy mansion ; there were pictures, too, in light—great set-pieces of welcome, changing from gold to red, and from red to green. Then, as if to draw Tota's very soul into the air, rockets were fired over the palace, bursting into green and golden showers—and all the people shouted ; the Maharajah was passing.

High on an elephant he sat, in a golden howdah picked out in light, glittering from head to foot. He was clad in cloth of gold, and bright gems sparkled in his turban and on his chest. Their King was in their very midst, and the huge crowd went mad, throwing rose petals and jasmine in the way, shouting. And little thin Tota—his eyes starting out of his head, his cheeks hot, his breath stifled—lifted up his voice and yelled. There was no doubt about his smile now ; it was immense, glorious, indelible. If ever a boy was in paradise, that boy was little Tota, the poor man's son.

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They returned to the village next day, and found it as they had left it—dirty, uncared for, desolate. But little Tota did not care ; the village was not, after all, the world ; and, packed away in his big head, was a pageant all his own. He could still see the Lancers, and the painted elephants, and the sea of light, and the King. Joy was inside him, and in the beyond . . . some to-morrow . . . another Dasehra.

A PLANTER'S HOME

CHAPTER I

You will find them in all the hills, and they will always give you welcome—in the Himalayas, from Dehra Dun to Almora, and in lonely places beyond Almora ; in the Assam gardens, in Bihar, away East to Burma ; and again in the blue hills of the South, Mercara of Coorg, Mysore, Ootacamund, and the Wynaad. All these are the places of the planters, and, where they are, you pass through a garden of English flowers to an English welcome.

Patriotic poets have not extolled them, and history passes them by ; their statues do not smile or frown down dusty thoroughfares, and they are but rarely found in the roll of the Star of India ; but nevertheless they have one most enduring title to fame—they have held on.

The officials come and go, and make the best or worst of it before they take their pensions and go for ever. Much they may achieve in India, but never one thing—Home. That is left to the planters, and is perhaps the greatest achievement of all.

Yet they are unassuming. They find that dignity can be maintained without scarlet-clad chaprassis haunting their steps like animated geraniums ; a coolie with the cartridges does as well.

They are the permanent element, the unity in all our diversity and change. When the 'heaven-born' grow restless for home, the planters are content with the earth,

which after all is the same element in Dehra Dun and Dorking. Wild roses blossom, say they, as well on the Ooty downs as in Berkshire hedges, and the cuckoo calls in the hill hollows of Sat Tal as clear as in Surrey woods.

'There is enough of England here,' they would say, 'to satisfy sentiment. Add the unfailing sun, kindly in the hills; brighter birds, butterflies, and flowering trees; and the life of the jungle. Take away smoke, and fog, and noise. Then give me a home, and the sum suits me.'

They—the real settlers, be it understood—are proud to be of the country, for their fathers and mothers paid for it in the Mutiny days, some in blood, all in anxiety and discomfort. They held on then, and will always hold on—if they are allowed to. Only once have they deserted their posts in the gardens, and that was to help officer the Indian Army all the world over. Then they saw much of the world, and revisited their schools and their friends, but those who survived are back in the gardens now, and we drink their coffee and tea as before. Let one of them stand for all.

CHAPTER II

Tarbutt is a good old Cheshire name, but one branch of the family knows Cheshire no more. In the year 1831 John Tarbutt put a few pounds in his pocket and sailed round the Cape for Calcutta, took months to get there, and was not particularly happy when he did arrive. The yeoman in him rebelled against the old-fashioned methods, still prevalent, of shaking the pagoda tree in that City of Government and Commerce, and he drifted up country to earn a modest but honest living on the land.

He married the daughter of a Scottish planter, and had one son, Henry, born in 1833. At the age of eighteen Henry in turn married a very beautiful girl indeed, the seventeen-year-old daughter of a missionary, with dark

hair, dark eyes, and the colour of a wild rose. They had two babies—a boy and a girl—and settled down happily on a small estate not far from that of old John Tarbutt, in a shady bungalow with familiar flowers decking their compound, and surrounded by old servants who called them father and mother, and meant what they said. They were not rich; they had but few neighbours, and Christmas was about their only gaiety; but they loved each other, worshipped their babies, and lived in peace.

Then, suddenly, their world was shattered. The storm of the Mutiny burst over India, destroying her peaceful places. Homes such as theirs were beset by wolf-like men, mad and inflamed, and treachery and lust had holiday.

The storm swept over the house of John Tarbutt; they murdered the old man, and destroyed all that he had built up in twenty years, leaving behind them a desert. Then they made for the home of Henry Tarbutt, his son.

Henry had just one hour's notice of what was coming. He had got his wife and the babies away in charge of the old bearer and ayah, proved for the trust when few could be trusted, and was himself following with a few precious possessions, when a man saw him and shouted.

Unable to take the path by which his wife had gone but five minutes before, Henry saved her and lost his own life, at odds of fifty to one, in sight of the flames that were destroying his home.

A year later, an old-young woman, with two little children, applied for a plot of land for the purpose of making a tea-garden, in the South of India. Her request was granted for pity's sake, because she had suffered much; but no one believed that this frail woman with the drawn face and hair prematurely white could make good.

Picture a lonely widow, with the choice of leaving the land of her sorrow for ever, holding on because her man

had held on ; because it was in her blood ; because she conceived it her duty to hug her cross.

It was, in all seeming, mad ; quixotic beyond measure ; incredible. But it happened . . . and she made good.

CHAPTER III

I met John Tarbutt the second in France and, being thrown with him for some time, came to know him well. He had joined up as soon as he could persuade the authorities to have him, being specially blessed, he said, in being able to leave his old mother with confidence to run the estate . . . a wonderful old lady, by all accounts, who had been through the Mutiny and had actually elected to stay in India ; nothing would shift her, said her son John.

He was a good-looking fellow, with curly brown hair and the most dare-devil, laughing, brave eyes you ever saw ; his skin, too, was extraordinary for a man, and a resident of India at that—soft as a child's, quick to colour.

He could walk any distance, without turning a hair, and was as strong as a horse, putting his health down to the life in the hills and simple diet.

He was fonder of talking of his old mother than of himself, but what little he told showed that he knew the jungle upside down, and had observed every animal, bird, and butterfly in it. He did not cram you with what he had shot, but would rather delight you with what he had seen and not shot. Incidentally, he was the best patroller in the brigade, having the gift of moving like an animal, and of hearing and interpreting sounds which other people would not notice at all.

War—the monotony, the filth, and soddenness—he hated, and I know that he longed for the free hills again, where he was his own master and could get things done.

‘You must come and see my old mother,’ he said when we parted ; ‘you’ll like her. She’s just on eighty,

but she gets up at cock-crow every morning of her life, and has a walk round the place ; and she won't let any-one else make the beds. She has never been to England since she was a girl, and she'll never go. Come and take your first leave with us, and I'll show you how we grow tea, and some other things as well. You'll have to go on foot though, mostly, and it's rough going. We've no elephants there, except the wild ones.

'India's going to be a great place after the war. You official chaps couldn't help it, but things have been getting a bit slack. Perhaps we see more of the other side ; the native will talk to us sometimes, when he won't to you. There has been an idea going about that old England is weakening, but the war will set that right. When we win out over here, we shall have the biggest opportunity we ever had in India ; look at the tales these sepoys will take back ; look at our credit !'

'Yes,' I said, 'I suppose the Indian is a good judge of values. But have things really changed so much ?'

'I should rather think they have. Even I remember the day when an Indian would get off his pony or his donkey or his cart half a mile away, if he thought a saheb was coming along the road, and would stand salaaming in the dust till he was out of sight. We don't want that, of course ; and we don't want blood and force, and all that sort of thing. But they must at least credit us with strength, and we must rule as if we meant it, or clear right out.

'Anyway this old war has one bright spot : it will set us right and wake us up into the bargain.

'Well, I'm an awful chap when I get going, but I do like to see us at our best out there. I must be off now. Mind you drop us a line, and follow it up.'

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So it was that one fine morning I rode up the road through glades silvered with dew, over the hills and down

where the bright river twinkles across the track; then up again, through orderly plantations and a gay garden, to the brown bungalow of Mrs. Henry Tarbutt, and of her son, Captain John.

It was early, but she met me on the steps with a welcome that I shall not forget.

I had pictured an old, faded woman with a sorrowful past, who busied herself to keep her mind off painful things; hardened perhaps, not unnaturally; silent, surely.

But I was dead out. She was the most vital person one could imagine, absolutely brimful of life and the interest of living. Such a sweet, handsome face, too; hair like snow, over level brows and bright eyes, in which no pain lingered; clear features, and a determined little chin; John's skin, still rarer, and John's colour, fainter but finer.

But the poise of her head was what struck me most of all—it was so dauntless, making me understand what had seemed right above my head . . . her holding on.

Her voice was a girl's voice, with the tenderness of age to soften it. I fell in love with John's mother on the spot.

The place was home, as good as the world has to offer, and hospitality is a poor halting word for what I found there. Everything was so bright and so clean; there were no dark corners, and the sun rippled and winked through the trellis of the veranda, where the honeysuckle grew, as if he were glad to do the honours.

There was nothing heavy or pretentious; all the furniture was light and comfortable. No dull, lifeless daubs on the walls, but bright water-colours of jungle and stream and garden, done by John's sister before her marriage. There were a few faded photographs too—one of old John Tarbutt, kindly and grey-whiskered; a family group, with the tall hats and quaint bonnets of

early days ; a picture of a low bungalow ; a wedding party, with old John Tarbutt like a patriarch in the midst—surely the wedding of Henry. Lastly, there was a miniature of a very beautiful girl, with dark hair and dark eyes, and young roses in her cheeks.

I thought that they would not care to talk of the past, but it was not so. Mrs. Tarbutt herself showed me the pictures, and without a trace of that awkward reserve which sometimes accompanies painful reminiscence. Pride and love had conquered the pain in her. I always carry the impression of a very gentle woman when I think of her.

There was a spirit, too, in the house, which is seldom met with in the Englishman's abode in India. Our bungalows are but temporary shells, passed from hand to hand, seldom beautified, never adorned with our best ; little is given to these, and little do they give back. They have no abiding sense of rest or of peace, no history and no individuality. But here there was a difference. If ever a house did, this house reflected its owner . . . a house of gentleness.

And what a setting ! From the veranda we looked down a valley of green, and on either side were soft velvet hills, melting into blue. Here and there a bright-blossomed tree, scarlet, or mauve and white, hung like a flag from the hillside, setting off the green of the rest. Below, in the valley, the little bubbling river made music over the boulders, and lured us to scramble far. I learned to tramp the hills from a master, and every nook and fold had a history, told with a lover's touch. We saw timid deer at their drinking ; came on a leopard basking in the sun, and rejoicing in his new coat ; caught bright, keen mahseer in the sparkling runs of the river, and drank deep of the good water when we were thirsty. Thus I came to an understanding of what was at the back of John Tarbutt's love of India.

He loved his work too, and I enjoyed following him round the gardens, and hearing him give his orders in his quiet way. The coolies, I remarked once, seemed unusually contented.

'Afraid not,' he replied, to my surprise. 'I don't say much about it, but I have had the disappointment of my life since I came back from France. I used to think that the war would straighten things out, but it hasn't—far from it.'

'I remember your saying so,' I said. 'Of course things are a bit muddled at present, and none of us quite know where we stand, but surely we shall settle down when the Councils are working.'

'Councils!' he laughed. 'What are Councils to coolies? And, look here. We hang a man, don't we, if he poisons another fellow? Yet, sure as I stand here, these men are being poisoned, and I can't raise a finger to stop it. Dirty sedition-mongers come and go in their lines, and if I give them the boot, as I ought to, ten to one I get run in and they get compensation. So the poison goes on. I tell you, old chap, we shall have trouble here, sure as fate. This year, next year . . . who knows? But it will come.'

'What will you do?' I asked.

'Oh, I shall carry on as long as I can. No use panicking.'

CHAPTER IV

Only a few months later I had good reason to remember that conversation.

One morning, quite unexpectedly, I saw the bald headlines in the paper . . . **RISING IN MALABAR.**

Few details were given; the situation was obscure; but planters had been attacked, and Captain Tarbutt was missing, his last action having been to persuade his mother, an old lady of eighty, to go to Ootacamund.

I imagined what the situation must have been to make this persuasion possible, and I mourned, thinking that John Tarbutt had held on too long.

A day or two later we got details, and I breathed again. Apparently Tarbutt had been warned of the approach of a hostile mob, and had persuaded his mother to leave him, and dismissed the servants. Though he was told that the mob were crying out for his head, he had remained at his post in the hope that saner counsels would prevail, in view of his reputation for fair dealing; he must, too, have longed to save his home somehow, by some last inspiration.

Alone in the house, he must have watched the mob coming up the valley, and have seen and heard their madness . . . one man against five hundred. There had been method, too, in the madness, for they had surrounded the house before they set fire to it.

Then had come the miracle.

Clad as a coolie in a wisp of rag, unarmed and alone, John Tarbutt had slipped through the trap, and had made the hills. The uncertainty voiced in the papers had merely been due to the length of his journey by little-known tracks.

Not long afterwards I received a hurried letter from him :

‘I thought it was all up with me,’ he wrote, ‘but I meant to stick it out as long as possible for the sake of the old home. There was always the off-chance of something turning up at the last moment. But they had some one behind them—I think I know who—and ringed me completely. Some of them made a rush from the front, but I dodged them and hid in the bathroom behind my room, which I had first locked, while I completed my get-up, and listened to them discussing my head outside.

‘Then I waited; of course the silly fools set fire to the

house, and gave me my chance. While they were gaping at the flames I slipped out in the shadow, and got through them. The first five yards were tricky, but I learnt that wheeze patrolling. I blessed old France for that trick, I can tell you.

‘Once among them, it was easy, and I had a path ready mapped out in my mind’s eye for getting clean away.

‘But the pity of it, old man ! I did think the old home would last Mother her time. Fifty years . . . and a few charred beams to show for it ! But the hardest thing about it is that it ought never to have happened ; ought to have been scotched long ago.

‘Well—it’s no use crying. I’m off on a movable column to try and round up some of these devils, and I must get some kit together. My little mother is bearing up right well, and sends you her love. She says you must come and see us when we are straight again. Mind you do.

‘When we have put the fear of God into some of them, I am going to take my coat off and start rebuilding.

‘Yours,

‘JOHN TARBUIT.’

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‘Rebuilding’ . . . a noble word !

A WARRIOR FROM BHUT

HE was born in a world of white, far up in the mountains—a little shivering thing, no bigger than a mole, in the midst of a camp of dark blanket tents set in the snow. So cold was it that his brothers and sisters did not survive a night, and he had the shelter of his mother's thick warm fur to himself. From the first he was destined for a hard life, for very soon his mother pushed him out into the snow to find his feet, and to depend on his own coat, which grew rapidly. In a fortnight he was no longer a mole, but a little bundle of warm black fur, for all the world like a baby bear; his head was near as big as his body, deeply domed and furred, looming over a small face, with deep-set eyes and a sharp little black nose. When he opened his mouth to yawn, he showed a red cavern to the world, with the beginnings of strong teeth.

He knew early in life that he was born to one task—to watch—and if a stranger approached the tent he would bark defiantly in imitation of the deep, gruff voices of his father and his mother and his cousins, and would keep on barking till he was cuffed. He came of a breed of watch-dogs, guards of camp and sheep, terrors of night visitors, be they man or jackal; for, once a Bhutia has taken hold, he will not let go while life is in him.

He grew apace; within a month he was eighteen

inches high, and burly to a degree ; his fur stood out straight, and thick as carpet, and his body was so heavy that he tottered as he walked. He had tan points now, on the feet and legs, and jaw, and beneath the eyes. He could worry a bone, too, when he could get it, and was independent of his mother both for food and warmth. Also, his voice was breaking, the shrill note of childhood giving way to the mastiff bass—and he practised incessantly. He was rolled over daily by his mother to give him muscle, and by his cousins to try his spirit, and he came through the ordeal well. At any rate, he was allowed to live.

Then, one early morning, the camp started for the plains, more than a month's march away. The shaggy, horned sheep were driven into a bunch, and fitted with their little leather saddles and their bundles of merchandise. Then the dogs were called up and the flock driven down the track, while the men and women followed, laden with blankets and gear, spinning their wool and chattering.

The puppy walked with the rest. The first days of jostling in the narrow path on the hillside, with destruction below, wearied him exceedingly ; but soon his muscles grew perforce, and he became deep-chested, and strong-shouldered and seasoned. Soon the intense cold was left behind, and they passed through pine woods, shuffling over a path carpeted with needles, above precipices still steep, with silver streams far below. As they descended, greener and greener grew the hills, till one day they pitched their camp below a warm bazaar on the side of Bhim Tal lake, and saw the plains stretching below. Now the ring of the camp was made smaller, lest leopards should raid the sheep, and the gruff barks of the watchers often sounded in the night. By the time the moving camp had dropped into the plains, the puppy had put on the lineaments of maturity on a small scale, he was a dog.

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Take a bloodhound, and a mastiff, and an old-time otter-hound, and mingle them in one type; make it massive in body, and sturdy in the legs; make it walk with the silent precision of a leopard—slow, with head lowered, and feet meticulously placed; grow a fine crop of thick fur—and you have a fair specimen of the Bhutia dog. He has the colouring of the old-fashioned otter-hound; the domed head and the furrowed jowl of the bloodhound; and the chest and jaw of the mastiff—with the tenacity of the devil thrown in. His voice is deep bass, a little muffled; he will advance slowly, like a leopard, then spring for the neck with the speed and momentum of a charging boar—and there he gets a strangle-hold.

In character he is morose, apt to brood, and cautious until he has made up his mind; his temperament might be described as heavy, and he does not easily make friends. Though in old age he becomes too dangerous for civilized homes, there is no better watch-dog in the world. He owns only one master.

As is the type, so was the puppy—as independent and self-contained as dog could be.

Three years passed in watching. In winter the camp was pitched in a settlement down in the plains, near the buzz of the bazaar. Then, when the sun grew fierce and a thick coat was becoming intolerable, they went up the winding path through the foot-hills, behind the trotting, saddled sheep, clouded in dust till black coats turned grey; on through the pine woods, where the air was rarer, and vegetation more sparse; where the paths ran rugged and steep, and chakor¹ scuttled down the khud at their coming; where villages were perched in the high hills like rooks' nests, and the sheep had to scramble far among the boulders for their grass . . . and so to the beyond which was Bhut; there to await the finishing of the grain

¹ Chakor = A species of partridge.

from the pack-saddles and the carding of the wool, and to take the road again.

It was a monotonous life, but it suited the temperament of the puppy, and so he might have lived to the end . . . adventureless, save for an occasional growling scuffle with his cousins, when eyes showed red and fur stiffened, and the mastery of the family was at stake. Master he would surely be, sooner or later, for he was a shade taller than the usual run, a trifle more massive, and he had the jaw and teeth of a hyena—you cannot find any stronger.

So might he have lived, content with a limited mastery, if in the fourth year the party had not dipped down from the hills by a new route, and encamped at Tanakpur.

Tanakpur village lies at the very foot of the Himalayas, where the Sarda River breaks free of its mountain gorge and claims a wider bed of shingle and of sand; though the village boasts a railway station, a timber depôt, a water tower, and a hospital, it is nevertheless an absolute outpost of British India. For, set on the high bank of the Sarda, it looks across to the wide land of hill and green forest that is Nepal. The Himalayas tower over it to the north, while southwards the river scores its channels wider and wider amid islands belted with pale sheeshum trees, as it feels for the plains. As far as eye can see to the south, there stretches white shingle, broken only by these frail, fairy trees, guarding the ribbons of blue water. Of all fair prospects at the feet of the great hills, Tanakpur has the fairest.

It is a gathering-place of many types, for it is the railhead for Nepal and for the hills. To-day, market day, its bazaar is gay with merchandise—grain from the Terai; oranges and wool from the hills; brass, in shining pyramids, from Moradabad; bright cottons—crude embroidery—gay caps . . . all the finery of the poor.

But the men vary more than do the goods. Rough

Nepalese, with high cheek-bones and thick bodies, have crossed in the old ferry-boat—hollowed from a single tree—with their ponies swimming alongside, to barter with shrewd-faced Mohammedan merchants whom the train has brought from Bareilly. There are Paharis from above, and men of the Terai below, yellow with malaria, old before their time, riding listlessly in on their little ponies. Here is a group of smiling Goorkha soldiers discussing tonga-hire with a tall be-medalled Sikh who wears his grey beard in a net. By the liquor-shop there are Tharus—honest men, imported from the Punjab to till the Terai, being strangely fever-proof. Here a new tongue strikes the ear . . . soft and pleasing, unlike the hard Hindi of the hills; it is Pushtu, and the speakers have brought their donkeys all the way from Baluchistan for carrying work on the Sarda Dam. Wild men these, clad in loose garments, and walking with the half-veiled insolence of the Pathan. Not unlike them are the camel-men from Meerut, as they lead their staring charges up the crowded street and smoke the long pipe of a peaceful occupation.

But the strangest of all the motley crowd are the two Bhutia men from the far North, who are standing apart and watching. These men are not of India; there is much of the Chinaman in their faces, without his sluggish aspect; combine the high cheek-bones of the Mongolian with the aquiline nose and sharp look of the North-American Indian, and you are near a description of these two men. Their faces are hairless, and they wear caps of rough leather, turned up all round, with flaps for the ears at night. One wears a couple of cues down his back, while the other has raven hair combed out in a cloud beneath his leathern cap. Their clothing is of rough woollens, and they carry brown blankets over their shoulders, under which peep their cherished necklaces—lumps of amber, rough turquoise and cornelian, with



‘Two Bhutia men from the far North’

pendants of silver and blue. They are twirling their little spindles of wool—for they make their own stuffs—and smiling, when suddenly a hubbub breaks out from the direction of the river below. They listen a moment, as do their neighbours . . . then slip quickly away. He of the combed raven hair is the master of our hero, the Bhutia dog.

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He had lately been dubbed Sluggard by his master in the language of Bhut for a propensity to claim the privilege of rest for his dignity as head of the family. And Sluggard he looked as he lay that afternoon with his head on his paws, one eye closed and the other set sleepily on the distance across the river. Behind him, the bazaar was all a-clatter, while towards the river the sheep-bells made drowsy tinkling among the trees. All the men were away in the bazaar, and most of the women too, so that he was a solitary sentinel.

Suddenly he heard a stirring among the sheep; an old ram, with jingling bell, fussed into the camp, followed by several ewes; but beyond, among the sheeshum trees, the clamour still continued, and there were sounds of scuffling and of flight.

He was no sluggard now, as he sprang up with a gruff interrogation; listened for the fraction of a second; then shot from the camp, through the trees and past the scared sheep, to the other side of the belt, where rank green grass bordered the shingle.

Then, all at once, he stopped dead, every nerve a-quiver, every faculty alert, and gave his low, long-drawn challenge. In front of him lay the body of a young ram fresh killed, and beyond the ram, at its throat, lay a leopard, just raising its head from its meal. Back went its ears on the instant, and it grinned angrily, growling as if it were grinding out the sound through a mill, and switching its long tail to and fro.

Like a flash, the Sluggard went in. He made no sound, but simply flew straight for the throat, and when he felt the folds of skin and smelt the acrid smell of leopard, there he stayed. He was picked up, battered, and torn; big as he was, he was shaken like a rat in the enemy's efforts to be free; great teeth snapped at him and bit deep, while the sharp claws ripped his fur and left long lines of blood.

There had never been anything like this thing which he had attacked; weight, muscle, agility—all were against him. But he had one advantage—he had gone in first, and where he had found flesh he would stay.

Growling, snarling, gasping, they rolled over and over, dyeing the loose shingle with blood. The men in the bazaar heard it; fifty were running with lathis, and a hundred more were listening. But the Sluggard's master was first in the field.

He found them locked together on the very brink of the stream—the dead leopard, and the battered, bloody mass of fur, alive, but barely living. For a long time they could not unlock the Sluggard's jaws. When at last they succeeded, he wagged his tail feebly at his master, and went to sleep.

So, in the hearing of all that motley crowd, gathered from the ends of India, the Sluggard became the champion of his race—the only Bhutia who alone had slain a leopard. From thenceforward the people called him Warrior; but his master called him Friend.

THE LAW

THE Afridi's face was pale by Eastern standards. To the ordinary observer it was devoid of any emotion, and the mouth was still. The man stood alone, with a certain dignity, and never moved when the senior Indian officer, a Sikh, stripped him of his belt. With an air of apparent indifference he heard the short sentence in Pushtu: 'You have worked in secret against the authority of the Sircar. You have designed to betray the regiment which has nurtured you, and are a thing of shame in the eyes of your brotherhood. Now it is ordered that from henceforth you have no place with us, and you have brought this sentence on your own head. You will go.'

The man drew himself up to his full height, turned abruptly about, and left the Durbar. The Colonel rose from the table; every face, British and Indian, betrayed emotion — relief, scorn, satisfaction — something. Only the offender had seemed unaffected.

It was nearly time for mess. Colonel Omney had changed and was sitting on his veranda, catching the fitful breeze from the river. He had neglected the club that night, from a disinclination to discuss the event of the morning. His regiment had always been his religion; he had believed in the ultimate power of the British example to affect character, even in the case of the wild tribesman of the frontier. Hitherto his creed had seemed

justified. Other regiments had had cases of desertion, it is true; there were whispers of disloyalty among the tribes, particularly the large and turbulent tribe of Afridis; but his regiment had a clean sheet. He had good officers, carefully selected, and they had the confidence of their men; this had been proved a dozen times. And yet—here was this baffling case of Yakub Khan. For five years the man had been his own orderly; then he had been promoted for good intelligence work, and had fulfilled his early promise. He had been a certain candidate for further promotion to the rank of Indian Officer. And now he had been clearly proved to have been tampering with the loyalty of the younger Afridis. There had been only one possible course—degradation—in public Durbar. The Colonel felt it deeply, personally. He had believed that he knew his man. His whole creed was upset. Yakub Khan was a decided score for the cynics.

The Colonel was thinking in this strain, when the man's Squadron Commander, Major Sefton, dropped in on his way to mess, and took one of the long chairs. The Major suggested an extra guard on the bungalow, adding:

'I know it sounds fidgety, Colonel, but I know my Afridi. He's mugra;¹ he took it badly—never saluted—and he's disappeared. Akbar Khan was keeping an eye on him, but he gave him the slip. I can't help thinking we should have sent him up the road under escort. I never trust an Afridi.'

'Won't do, Sefton. I don't like the effect on the men. These fellows always hide their feelings, as you know. He never flinched, but he was ashamed. He'll disappear—get back to his own people—hide his head. We've done with him.'

The Major lit a cigarette before he answered.

'Maybe, Colonel. But I had a good view of him when you read out that sentence. I always look at a man's

¹ Mugra = Surly.

eyes. That man's face never moved. You might have thought he never heard. But I saw the whites of his eyes—once; just a flicker, when you told him to go. That flicker meant that he is an Afridi as much as when he left his village to join us. We have never touched him; we never do touch them—really, fundamentally. Look at their lives—family feuds from generation to generation—*lex talionis*—nicks on the rifle-butt—it's in the blood. Sure as I sit here, Colonel, that flicker meant the old thing; it registered a new enemy. That man has only one idea now.'

The Colonel got up, saying:

'I fear you are one of the cynics, Sefton. Come and have a short drink. We have just time.' And they strolled over to the mess.

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Yakub Khan had put off his khaki for ever. It had been hastened—that was all; he had never meant to die in it. It had suited his purpose to leave his village for a time, as he had shot the son of Sher Khan, and the old man had a large following and a good memory for faces. On his return, he must send old Sher Khan to join his son—then he could rest safe. Sher Khan would never expect him—unless that young Gul Haidar, who had started off on leave two days back, had spread the news. He would have to risk that. In any case Sher Khan was an old man, and might delay. He would start to-night, and be well over the pass at early dawn. He had but to finish his present business. That would be easy.

He had put on his ordinary national dress—a shirt of dark material, flowing free; loose pajamas of dingy white cloth; an untidy dark blue puggaree; a cartridge-belt round his waist. In his hand he carried a stolen service rifle, and a bundle. He crept from rock to rock in the dry river-bed, which commanded a view of the mess, making no sound. His aquiline, clean-cut face,

with the curved nose and hard mouth, was impassive as he lay down behind a rock and watched the khitmatgars¹ laying the table inside.

It was very still; he could hear the horses a quarter of a mile away in the regimental stables, and some syces² singing. He wished he could take a horse—but that would only make him a prominent object on the road.

Now he could hear the sahebs going across to the mess. He could see the glow of their cigarettes. Yes, there was the Colonel saheb, with his Squadron saheb. They were coming outside, into the veranda. The light was good. In a few minutes it would be better. Ah, there was a khitmatgar attending on them; now he had gone; the chairs were in shadow—but when they stood up the moon would catch them. His eyes flickered—once.

There was the trumpet; no more trumpets for him; they would be going in now. . . . The Colonel and his friend were standing up, clear in the moonlight. They were looking towards the river-bed; the Major saheb was urging something. . . . Now!

There was one rifle-shot from the direction of the river-bed, silence for a moment, almost till the echo had died away; the sound of a heavy fall—then a rushing—shouts—lights.

But the man in the river-bed had slipped away very quietly.

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The pass looked desolate in that half-hour before sunrise. A long pale road wound down into the valley; not a hint of a tree; no sound at all; and, on either side, hills dimly red, and rocks everywhere. At the top of the pass the hills were steep on either side. Thirty yards east of the road, and near the top, was a big rock, reaching like a shelf from the hillside, and commanding the road below. There was loose débris on this shelf—shingle and

¹ Khitmatgar = Waiter.

² Syce = Groom.

stones ; and it would have been hard, in that light, to pick out the man's head.

He lay still, his body quite hidden. His dirty tumbling brown puggaree was of a colour with the rocks. He had a rough red beard, and wild red hair. Little of his face showed, except the eyes—and they lay deep—grey-blue and cold. One would have said that he was an old man, for there were flecks of grey in the henna'd beard. His cheek lay against the breach of a Martini rifle, evidently locally built, with clumsy sighting. Yet the butt, had it been visible, would have shown a number of little nicks—proofs that the old man knew his weapon. The barrel was masked with some thin cloth. There was nothing for the sun to betray when it should rise.

The sun must have risen behind the hills. The light was improving. The old man watched the road. There were few early wayfarers. A party of men and women with donkeys, carrying bundles of grass, wandered up from their last camp in the rough plain by the river. A malik¹ on his pony, with a small following of retainers, passed down on his way to a tribal jirgha.² A descending flock of sheep, driven by two lusty lads with black ringlets and carrying little bows, made a great dust in the road. They none of them saw the watcher. He watched the dust into the valley. There was a cloud of it where the sheep ran down the steep incline to the ford over the slender stream. It hung there for some time—and then, a black dot against the cloud, a man emerged. Nearer he came, hurrying, darting his head to observe the hills above ; then his face was clear, pale against his dark blue puggaree ; the cock of his rifle behind him ; a point of light in his cartridge-belt. He was below the rock now ; he looked up, noting the dark stones ; he might have seen one stone stir ever so slightly ; then the shot rang out, and he pitched forward on the road.

¹ Malik = Petty chief.

² Jirgha = Session.



‘The old man watched the road’

This time the echoes of the shot lingered long. In the silence that followed, there might have been heard a sound of scrambling, and the fall of a displaced pebble. Sher Khan, wild and unkempt, was shambling up the hill, threading the rocks. At the crest he stopped, clear against the arisen sun, and danced from foot to foot with rifle held above his head. Then he disappeared.

THE HUMAN SPARK

PROFESSOR FORTESCUE SMITH was an avowed theorist. Theories were meat and drink to him—and it was truly said of him that he would die for a theory. Yet his contributions to the tested phenomena of entomology were of a high order; he was not unknown as a zoologist, and had made a valuable classification of animal sounds, in pursuit of one of his favourite theories. He was a popular lecturer, too, of learned societies, in spite of a tendency to pass modestly over the field of established fact in a few clear sentences, and then to soar into the wonderland which was dear to him. Not that he was unpractical; he was simply impatient of fact. He knew that just beyond the range of experience was an illumined field. Darwin had almost reached its boundary; *mutatis mutandis*, he was a firm follower of Darwin.

He liked travel; he left a well-paid post in England to become Imperial Entomologist to the Government of India. This was a three-years appointment, and it led to an expedition for research in certain little-known forests north-west of the sources of the Brahma-Putra river. For this purpose the Professor delayed his return to England for six months. He was last seen at Sibsagar Station with his servants and a pile of equipment—his blue eyes beaming behind his round spectacles—obviously radiantly happy. He did not consider the loneliness or the mosquitoes. He was off on a real holiday.

Fortescue Smith had a feeling throughout his pilgrimage that a unique experience awaited him on untrodden ground. It became a conviction, as an idea will to a lonely man. It called him beyond the limits of his original expedition to an unhealthy swamp country lying at the foot of low wooded hills. It led to trouble with his servants, who went down with a particularly malignant malaria, which defied inoculation. He lost three of them, and was forced to leave much of his camp equipment behind, including his specimen boxes—an important collection of facts. His own physique suffered, but he had always lived carefully, and had a wiry strength, backed by an unusually strong will. Also he had a firm conviction.

The Professor had been through a perfect purgatory of damp heat and fever before he came on his life's adventure. His was a triumph of mind over teeming, clogging matter. For some time they had been making for a knoll which stood out of the great wilderness of swamp—the last sentinel of the wooded hills. They reached it in the evening of May 19, and pitched the little camp at the highest point. That night was full of the noises of the jungle—the belling of stag, the sawing noise of a leopard, and the distant whine of a tiger. But the curious cry which they heard in the early hours of the morning was none of these. It was sudden and clear—not half a mile away; a shout of pain or anger, or both. Pain was in it certainly, for it died into a whimper; and anger, for it had a fierce quality. The servants, huddled together in one little tent, decided at once that it was the cry of a ghost—the Professor caught the word. Had he believed in the existence of ghosts, he would have been inclined to agree. For the cry was baffling, almost unearthly. It was just beyond the range of familiar things—reminding the Professor of something, but escaping actual resemblance. It was both human

and inhuman, if that were possible; a contradiction in terms; man unmanned; or animal almost man, but lacking the essential quality which makes a voice human even when a man is mad or terribly afraid.

So the Professor analysed the cry, which interested him profoundly. He concentrated on it for the rest of the night. To him it seemed that the voice had a note in it which he ought to have recognised, but which was too sensitive for his perception, and so eluded him. Although his ear could recall the sound, his mind refused to make the connection.

Whatever it was, it was of importance to his pet theory. In his pamphlet on 'Animal Communication' he had taken up the position that it was possible for man to interpret the sounds of animals, if he but found the key. He held that man had had that gift at the stage of pure instinct—before the appearance of any kind of self-consciousness; that species man had been able to understand the inter-communication of other species—the word 'understand' being used without any implication of conscious intelligence; then man had been alienated by the growth of self-consciousness, and the power buried. But it was still a potentiality.

In furtherance of his theory, the Professor had made a minute study of animal sounds, classifying them, memorizing them, trying to connect them with external phenomena. He had formed a conclusion that the study of animal psychology must follow these lines—that a great illumination was just round the corner. . . . All of which goes to show that the Professor was not simply a man hearing a weird cry, but an expert analysing an experience scientifically. In any case, he lost his morning sleep.

The Professor got up very early to begin his search for traces of the author of that cry. As usual, he went

alone, following the direction of the sound so far as he could judge it. Walking was difficult; he had to contend with giant creepers and dense foliage; nor did he know whether to look above his head or on the ground—for the cry had come from down the hill. It was the purest chance that he was successful. He had almost given up from fatigue and the heat of the sun, and, after a three-hours' struggle, was sitting on a fallen tree by the stream which meandered round the foot of the hill.

Then he heard a whimper—the little whining cry of something nursing pain alone. The sound came downstream, and the Professor jumped up. It was different from the cry of the night, but one never knew.

He came upon it as it lay in an open place quite near the stream. It had its back to him—a mass of dark hair, particularly thick at the spine. It was bigger than a monkey—and different . . . could it be a man?

The Professor was a good stalker; very quietly he worked round till he could see the creature's face. The low forehead and high cheek-bones were just discernible in the long, matted hair. Clearly it was a man—but not such a man as he had ever seen.

The man was lying with one leg bent up under the body. The Professor was tremendously afraid of frightening him; no doubt there was an injury, but was it sufficient to prevent flight? He could not chance it. So he watched intently; he was characteristically proof against any feeling of fear.

Soon the man moved; the right leg was painful, for he cried again, crooning to himself as it were. Then he tried to drag himself to the stream. The Professor noticed that the arms were very long, and that the fingers and toes were long and curved—a climber, clearly. The right leg appeared to be broken. Flight would be impossible.

The Professor decided to go back to the camp and fetch a relief party.

When he had arrived he at once superintended the making of a rough stretcher, and took four men to help him. They found the man lying in the same place. At their approach he showed fear—the eyes wandering; there was an attempt at flight, but the leg made movement impossible. The servants hated the business of moving him, but the Professor had a quiet manner for such occasions, and the thing was done without even the use of chloroform. The man was carried back to the camp and the Professor set the leg as best he could. There was no abrasion, but considerable swelling, the accident appearing to have been the result of a fall from a great height. There were wounds in the neck and shoulder, as of bites, and the Professor was of opinion that the man had been hard pressed, and had fallen in flight, half insensible from the pain of the bites, which were very deep. Throughout the examination no sound was made beyond whimpers of pain—and there was no change of expression beyond the coming of fear into the shifty eyes. Finally coma set in and lasted throughout the day. The Professor at last got his breakfast.

The diary of Professor Fortescue Smith, in which he recorded the discovery and treatment of the wild man, has happily been preserved. It shows that the Professor attached the greatest importance to his find, and that he anticipated conclusions of a startling nature from the tests which he devised. His mind was evidently running on his old theory of animal psychology, and he concentrated on the wild man to the exclusion of all other interests—notably of his own health.

From May 20—the date of the capture—the diary is devoted to the wild man. There are innumerable details of special interest to a scientific man; careful measurements are recorded; several pages are given to speculation based on the formation of the head, leading

to the Professor's theory as to the origin of the wild man. He came to the conclusion that he had found a jungle man, adopted by apes in babyhood, analogous to the wolf children occasionally found in India. The absence of callosities on the hands and feet, and the abnormal development of certain muscles, indicated this conclusion. The man, he thought, had originally belonged to one of the wild tribes in the neighbourhood. Every sound, every tendency, every movement was recorded. Diet was evidently a difficulty at first, but tinned milk was taken; cooked food was never touched. The wounds in the neck and shoulders healed rapidly, but the Professor despaired of ever getting the leg right. He foresaw paralysis. The wild man would certainly never climb again, and would only walk with difficulty.

Most interesting of all are the Professor's tests, which he tabulated on May 29, beginning his special observations on the following day. The food test came first. He had from the first made a rule that he alone would approach the man and administer food to him. The servants doubtless thought him mad, and gladly avoided the little shelter of boughs in which lived a creature which they believed to be a devil inhabiting the body of a monkey. The food test was the first step to establishing recognition; following it, he had devised a sound test, touch tests, and, finally, memory tests. The object underlying these tests was to establish a connection with the wild man. The Professor believed ardently in the possibility of communication, given the right medium. He believed that his great chance had come.

There is a suggestive passage to this effect—written at night on June 5. 'The medium of communication,' he writes, 'is everything. Somewhere there must be a key—probably in feeling, the consciousness of what is outside. . . . First he must recognise me—be conscious of me as something outside, if possible as something

similar. Communication can be, must be, through feeling.'

And again . . . 'I believe that I shall make the picture clear. He lives in both worlds, and holds the very secret—he is the essential link in the evolution of mind. I must touch him; then . . . the first tiny human spark.'

The reasoning is incoherent, but the Professor was in a high fever when he wrote it. It appears that he felt pains in the limbs on June 5, and only dragged himself up for an hour the next day—which hour he spent with the wild man, and of which he notes significantly.

'Complete recognition established. Possibility of more. There are moods. A critical stage.' His own symptoms he does not mention; the critical stage was rather his. His servants looked after him as best they could, but they could not realise the effect of the mental strain—the intense, wearing excitement. Nor could they prevent him from crawling—shaking in every limb, but quite indomitable—to visit the wild man. He would repeat to himself, over and over again: 'The chain . . . must not break the chain.'

It is clear that he laid all stress on the continuity of his visits.

The last entry occurs on June 11. It is very short, and unfinished; it runs thus:

'Affection possible. To-morrow——'

This is the last recorded utterance of Professor Fortescue Smith. He was found the same evening in the shelter of the wild man—quite dead. The wild man was sitting by his side, rocking himself to and fro, with little whimpering cries. He cried louder when they took the body away, and refused to take food or drink. He died two days after the Professor.

The human spark had come . . . too late.

A BRACE OF FOXES

CHAPTER I

'KALLU BUNJARA beta Ahmad banam Mubarik Hussein. Koi hai Kallu Bunjara ?' ¹ yelled the chaprassi outside the court, with that peculiar whining intonation reserved for public utterance.

'Kalla Bunjara, age ao,' ² echoed the jemadar incisively, in the accents of command; then, as an afterthought, and in the languid tones of one who has not been properly plied with the rupee of justice, 'Mubarik Hussein, tum bhi ao. Jalde. Saheb Bahadur tumhare waste nahin baithenge.' ³

Spectators and witnesses moved aside, while two pairs of shoes were shuffled off at the door. The two ancients came forward and salaamed profoundly as a preliminary to the simultaneous utterance of their grievances . . . louder and louder, with growing animation, till the bewildered saheb held up his hand.

There was a silence in court while the joint magistrate took stock of the two veterans. He saw two very different specimens of the children of Islam. Both were bearded, be it said, but this was the only outward point of resemblance. The joint magistrate had hardly been long enough in Mahairi, or for that matter in India, to realise

¹ 'Kallu Bunjara, son of Ahmad, *versus* Mubarik Hussein. Is Kallu Bunjara present ?' ² 'Age ao' = 'Come forward.'

³ 'You come too, Mubarik Hussein. Hurry up. The great Saheb will not sit long for the like of you.'

the resemblance of their spiritual gifts. That knowledge was to come.

Kallu, horse-coper and money-lender, was toothless and tottering, and mumbled in his parti-coloured beard. That ornament was meant by nature to be white as snow, but he had evidently in the past dyed it with henna, and some strands retained the tinge of red while others had blossomed into yellow. The dust of Mahairi lingered



Kallu



Mubarik Hussein

on Kallu, whose clothes had a tumbled appearance, as if he had been hustled on a long journey, while the outer folds of his brown puggaree almost caressed his shoulders. His garments, like the beard, had once been white.

His face was incredibly furrowed, and his lips bloodless ; the nose was hooked like a beak ; the eyes, under shaggy brows, were the only evidence of his alertness, filled with tears though they were.

There were no tears in the composition of his rival. Mubarik Hussein was perhaps as old a man as Kallu, but far better preserved . . . a dignified dandy.

His long black coat with buttoned collar was the product of Meerut, not of Mahairi ; his round black cap

was discreetly broidered in gold, and his legs were clothed in spotless white, falling in graceful folds. His shoes, lying neglected by the door, revealed red and green threadwork to set off their curves; and the ebony stick, with its large head of silver—now in the hands of a satellite outside—would have shown him richer than he cared to appear at the moment, had the said satellite been capable of indiscretion.

His face was kindly to a degree, and wreathed in smiles; his beard was parted and brushed outwards in two grey wings, and not a hair was out of place; while his manners conformed with his clothes—courtly, urbane, polished.

The joint magistrate was inclined to think, as he glanced from one to the other, ‘A pathetic old pauper . . . a dignified, deferential old gentleman.’ Incidentally this was precisely the impression that the two belligerents had studied respectively to convey.

Pity the joint magistrate! Not long had he been in India, and few were the civil cases which he had been called upon to decide, and these had mostly gone by default.

Alone in that important chair, flanked by an impassive reader and two impassive chaprassis, watched by thirty pairs of calculating eyes, he had the painful necessity of making up his mind . . . of coming, after days of impassioned argument and incessant scribbling, to a decision which was certain to be wrong.

There was no one to warn him, but his case was worse than he knew; he was confronted with a *cause célèbre*, an ancient and a tortuous feud which would have troubled Solomon; an affair of parties and meetings and bribes and spittings in the streets, hashed up annually in a new form as the standing dish of fresh joint magistrates, and affording all the interest of a theatrical performance to partisans and spectators alike.

The contest for the Apple of Paris could have hardly afforded the same scope for enjoyment as this affair of the two bearded citizens of Mahairi.

What matter if money were wasted and paper squandered on ishtamps,¹ and witnesses, and mukhtars,² and notices and summonses? Government, in its great wisdom, had placed the lists at the disposal of the knights, providing an umpire gratis . . . on with the fight, and no quarter!

In the days of old the veterans would have had a rough-and-tumble in the bazaar, while their adherents whacked each other with lathis³; it would have all been over in five minutes, and blood in small quantities would have salved the pride which gave the affair its zest, with mutual satisfaction and hand-shaking. Then the tamasha⁴ would have been short and sweet, with nothing of lingering bitterness in it, and the joint magistrate of that age would have bound over the parties to keep the peace, and gone home to polo.

But no . . . *tempora mutantur*.

It had begun, in the mists of the past, with a quarrel over a Moharram⁵ procession, followed by a charge of violent assault (complete with wounds and witnesses), and a counter-charge of public nuisance. Honours had been easy.

Despairing of the criminal courts, the parties had turned to the civil, with the result that a flood of complaints and notices had flowed free for five years, much to the advantage of the stamp revenue. Then came the *bonne bouche*—the question of the right-of-way to Kallu's house through Mubarik's field.

There is something romantic about a right-of-way. For one thing, it rests on ancient usage; for another,

¹ Ishtamp = Stamp.

² Mukhtar = Minor attorney.

³ Lathi = Bamboo pole.

⁴ Tamasha = Display, show.

⁵ Moharram = Mohammedan festival.

it is of fairy nature, now disappearing altogether, now reappearing, now contracting, now expanding . . . you never know exactly where you have it, and if you go to the spot to demarcate, you are gravely informed that it has temporarily disappeared through the deceit of the other party to the suit.

This had been the fate of the last joint magistrate, who had left Mahairi with the unsolved problem of the right-of-way winding across his heart. If Kallu were deprived of his path, he could not get his carts to his granary; if Kallu's carts had their way, Mubarik's crops would surely suffer. Carts and crops . . . that was the pith of it.

CHAPTER II

The joint magistrate scratched his head, foreseeing many witnesses and no tea. There would be no harm, he thought in his innocence, in a little informal talk.

Very well—Kallu should speak first.

The stream of words, starting from an obscure source in Kallu's beard, soon swept in his rival, with the following result—

'Honoured sir, I am but an old man . . .'

'I too am old, protector of the poor, and have served the Sircar faithfully, without considering my poor self, for . . .'

'My sons have I given freely in the service of Your Honour. Is not one of them even now Your Honour's chaprassi? Will Your Honour condescend to look at him now. . . .'

'My father's father, Huzoor, was a member . . .'

'He lies, O compassionate for slaves. His father's father was but a badmash.¹ Your Honour knows that I would not tell lies in the place of justice. If I have not my road,

¹ Badmash = Bad character.

how will my carts fare forth ? I am but a poor man, but he pays Income Tax on . . .’

‘I am poorer than he ; my income was rated too high, Huzoor, but who am I to dispute the ruling of the Sircar ? But he—he lends money to all and sundry and tramples on the poor ; a lakh ¹ of rupees . . .’

‘A crore ² of rupees lie in the coffers of Mubarik Hussein. There are with me eight witnesses. . . .’

‘Twelve witnesses have I brought. If, Huzoor, you will but give ear . . .’

The strophe and antistrophe tended to be interminable, when the joint magistrate caught the word ‘witnesses’ ; twenty of them ; cross-examination !

Rather he would ride to the spot, and settle the matter out of hand. So a day was fixed, and the patwari³ ordered to attend with his measuring-tape.

Kallu dried his tears with the fringe of his puggaree, while Mubarik bowed to the ground, remarking that never had he set eyes on so just a saheb. Then they frowned at one another, snorted, and puffed in their beards, while the joint saheb trotted off to his tea, with the feeling inside that he had a way with him.

He could not know that wagers were being freely offered behind him, the odds being a rupee to an anna against settlement ; but there were no takers. As well try to divert the stream of Ganges as decide between Kallu Bunjara and Mubarik Hussein, the two foxes of Mahairi.

Yet sometimes the incredible comes to pass.

CHAPTER III

No one, after a casual glance at little Birkat, would have said that he looked like a boy of destiny. He had too vacant an air altogether, besides being stunted in

¹ Lakh = Ten thousand.

² Crore = Hundred thousand.

³ Patwari = Village Revenue official.

body and small even for his eight years . . . a ragged, ill-fed little chap, without any particular interest in life, one would have surmised.

Unconscious of the atmosphere of importance that must have characterised the spot—the very stage of the drama—he drove his ponies, without a glance, past the fields of Mubarik and the house of Kallu as if these were but ordinary features of the landscape. It was the very eve, too, of the ‘Junt’ Saheb’s visit.

As a fact, Birkat was thinking of the invitation of shade offered by a green tree on the other side of the road to a driver of ponies at three o’clock in the afternoon—an invitation which he was pleased to accept.

Meanwhile the five little ponies, more alert, it would seem, than their master, were straying from side to side of the road and exploring. Presently one of them came on a track leading straight on to the fields—a dusty, indeterminate track, well scored with cart-wheels, and tending towards a straw-roofed house among trees. But midway was a land of promise indeed . . . little fields of green young wheat, separated only by narrow water-channels, such as a pony might jump for sport.

So another invitation was accepted.

Five ponies nosed the entrance, hesitated, and then made their guilty dash. Four ponies surged, kicking and rioting, on to the little fields, while one struggled at the entrance, his leg seemingly caught . . . for he kicked and kicked.

When little Birkat, hearing the noise, had left his shade, he found a pretty mess ; the fifth pony had stepped into a neat trap-door of wickerwork masking a deep hole at the side of the track, nicely calculated to catch the wheel of a bullock cart, and inevitably to upset it as it turned into the track.

Only a Bunjara’s pony could have missed breaking a leg.

This was Mubarik Hussein’s last little pleasantry, preliminary to the serious business of the morrow. Birkat

was so full of interest in the device that for ten minutes he forgot his ponies, which were grazing and playing by turns a couple of fields away, where Mubarik had that morning unconsciously provided a capital recreation-ground by turning a flood of water on to the wheat, so that the fields were sodden and receptive of impression.

By the time Birkat had collected his charges, and had furtively passed down the main road in their wake, those fields resembled a cavalry parade-ground after manœuvres in heavy rain. Kallu's carts, had he had fifty of them, could not have done better than did those little ponies.

In such degree was Birkat a boy of destiny.

CHAPTER IV

It was not unnatural that Mubarik Hussein should take an evening stroll through his wheat-fields on the eve of the promised Waterloo, nor that Kallu should totter down to mark the homing of his carts.

It was a beautiful evening—cool after a fierce day, the trees throwing long shadows across the wheat. As the pink light of evening was being born on the horizon, Kallu set foot on his right-of-way, while Mubarik stepped off the main road into his fields, each comfortably alone with his thoughts.

Suddenly Mubarik plucked at his beard ; then, with an agility remarkable for his years, he leaped over the cactus hedge into his fields, and stood speechless with emotion at the sight of the ravages on their surface.

An enemy had done this . . . and, pray, who more likely than Kallu Bunjara ?

He looked up towards Kallu's house, and saw the old man shambling at his ease along the right-of-way, when by rights he should have been extricating a broken cart from a hole and scrabbling in a heap of spilt grain.

The sight of him was too much for Mubarik Hussein,

who lost his head completely. Invoking the spirits of his ancestors, and brandishing the silver-headed cane in the air like a spear, he made straight for the unconscious figure of his rival, three fields away.

Unfortunately he had not stopped to consider that fatal morning inundation. He lost both his shoes in the



‘Pride was salved in the old, old way’

first field, and plunged into a morass in the second, with the result that by the time he was within speaking distance of Kallu he had no breath for speech.

Now Kallu was an infirm veteran, but he knew that he who waits in an encounter of this kind is lost. So he at once tweaked the beard of Mubarik, and had pulled it well before his own came under strain. Inextricably tangled as to the beards, the two heroes of a hundred fights subsided on to the cushion of soft earth provided by a well-watered wheat-field.

Birkat had achieved the incredible; he had brought matters to a head. The lists were the lonely fields, and there was no umpire at hand to award the prize, but pride was salved in the old, old way. A mutual dignity was now at stake, and the rivals were henceforth bound by a common interest. No one must know of the fight, and only by making common cause could they invent plausible explanations for the bruise on Kallu's forehead and the gap in Mubarik's beard.

No one witnessed the final scene. If anyone had, he would have rubbed his eyes. For, hand in hand like children, the dandy and the usurer walked back to the house of the latter by the famous right-of-way itself, and, after a touching show of bashfulness about priority, entered in.

Once inside they had a tremendous talk, and when Mubarik finally departed he had bought a pony and borrowed a hundred rupees to pay for it.

Next morning, when the joint magistrate cantered up he found everyone smiling.

'Ap ke ikbal se ham razi ho chuke hain,'¹ the parties told him, and he rode away with the impression that they meant it. So every one was pleased.

But the bazaar still regards it as a modern miracle.

¹ 'Ap ke ikbal se,' etc. = 'Through Your Honour's might we have agreed.'

THE SEED

CHAPTER I

‘How long shall we suffer it? How long, my brothers? Our young men are unmanned; our old men, our fathers, are beaten in the streets; our daughters are betrayed. Have we no substance in us—no seed of strength? Truly in this latter day a man should arise and take a sword, and laugh to see red blood on the sword. Verily the man who hath blood on his sword shall be blessed of all men, now and hereafter. His name shall never die.

‘Arise, young man, and take thy sword, and see that thou sharpen it well, and that thou have blood on it before another sun sets. Let the red blood drip from it on to the glad earth, that all men may know that a man hath arisen, and hail thee saviour. Arise, young man, and slay.’

The stout little man with the spectacles leaned back against the wall, his pen poised in mid-air, and chuckled. He looked the very last man to be connected with a sword—the pen was so obviously his weapon. Nor would one have associated him with the shedding of blood, for he was a merry man with the round eyes of an excited child, and fat little lips under a downy moustache which were made to laugh. His whole appearance was eloquent of good living and good humour; he bubbled and gurgled with it. Moreover, he had every reason to be happy; his pen had earned ten rupees in an hour; old Moti Singh

could hardly give him less ; great were the blessings of a good education and an easy pen ; glorious to write without stopping to think of what was written. Moti Singh had asked for blood, and blood had slipped off his pen as easily as ink.

He stuck his pen behind his ear, put on his little black cap at a jaunty angle, and tripped lightly down the stairs—the very embodiment of good cheer. Then he walked rapidly down the street in the gathering dusk, humming a love-song of his own composition ; turned to the right at the new temple, crossed the busy street, and dived into a dark doorway a few yards down. He knocked at another door and passed in.

He was in a little room, which was chiefly occupied by a printing press and littered bales of paper. It was marvellously untidy—the floor deep in wrappings, the walls covered with pamphlets loosely pinned up, curled with the heat. A lamp was standing unsteadily on a rickety table in imminent danger of toppling on the head of the old man who sat on the floor. He rather resembled the paper himself—so thin and frail was he ; his beard was grey, and he was clothed in brown, sitting on the grey floor like a dead leaf in dust. His face, too, was as parchment, yellowed and dried ; there was no colour in the thin lips, and no light in the pale eyes, whose rims were a little red. One would have said that life had been sucked out of him by time, leaving an empty, bloodless skin without bowels of mercy.

Great was the contrast between the old man and his merry visitor, as the former stretched out a shrivelled hand to take the pamphlet—then adjusted his spectacles and read it over. ‘Yea,’ he mumbled, ‘there is enough of blood in it ; this is a good message for whosoever will hear it. I will take it.’ He fumbled in his clothes and brought out a little bag of leather, from which he deliberately counted out ten bright rupees. The merry little man

pocketed the rupees and turned to go, with a salutation. When he looked back, the old man was already setting up the Urdu type, bending over the metal letters in the dim room.

CHAPTER II

In the early morning the old man had another visitor of a very different type, who swept swiftly down the street and entered without knocking. He was a tall man, of good presence, dressed in a long coat of black silk, well fitting, and buttoned up to the neck. Below were snowy white pyjamas, made full; neat embroidered shoes, turning up like ships' prows; and on his head a high, round black cap embroidered with gold. He had a bushy black beard, long and full, but neatly kept—heavy eyebrows, and shrewd black eyes. They were intensely alive—the eyes of one who could both scheme and act, but who lived rather by scheming.

No words were wasted: he towered over the old man, as if he threatened him, and asked: 'Are they ready?'

The old man gathered up a sheaf of yellow papers from the floor and handed them to him, saying:

'They are ready, Sheikh: all night have I toiled to make fifty, but they are worth a night's labour. There is a spirit in these lines to fire young men. Yea, the fire will be well lit. . . . God alone can sustain it.'

'It is well,' replied the visitor, and glanced over the bunch of papers, smiled, and left the house. He walked back to a shop which bore the sign—

'Sheikh Hassan Hussein, Boot and Shoe Emporium' in English and Urdu and Hindi. The streets were just awaking; sleepy servants were rubbing their eyes and taking down shutters, but the world was not yet abroad. As he entered the shop he heard a high call to prayer from the mosque.

A young man was awaiting Hassan Hussein inside the shop—a handsome youth, with a curled moustache and oiled hair, and languorous eyes ; he was clad all in white, save for his cap of purple and gold, his bright yellow shoes with dangling silk laces, and mauve socks—a dandy, clearly of the modern type.

They talked earnestly for some time, Hassan Hussein's black eyes sparkling as he tapped the papers with his fingers, emphasising directions of importance. He was evidently accustomed to giving orders.

At length the dandy strolled carelessly from the shop, the papers concealed under his shirt, in the direction of the Mohammedan College, towards which pupils were already straggling. He appeared to have plenty of friends, for he held several conversations with the students, button-holing them intimately, and pressing something on them. By the time the college bell had ceased ringing he had distributed all the fifty pamphlets in lots of five. Then he walked carelessly away, as he had come. . . .

Thus was the seed sown.

CHAPTER III

The Indian student is the product of an age of doubt ; he has learned enough to laugh at his forefathers, but not enough to discriminate between the genuine and the tawdry elements of the new age. Stripped naked of tradition, he asks for a sign ; and the gaudier it is the more likely is he to accept it. Being an empty vessel he is easily filled with nonsense, but there is hope for him. What is easily filled is easily poured out . . . he may forget the nonsense. Change and novelty are ever the food of youth.

Occasionally, however, there is found an original type, prone to retain impressions . . . and such was Wali Mohamed Khan of the Mohammedan College.

Wali Mohamed was serious-minded ; he had the long face and the fixed eyes of a brooder, and he never smiled. Perhaps his birth and training had something to do with the intensity of his character, for his father was steeped in the fiercer teaching of the Koran, and had the uncompromising qualities of a fanatic. He was something of a scholar, and could talk inspiringly of the old religious wars, so that his son Wali Mohamed, who never forgot things, had been impressed with the righteousness of *jehad*¹ and the certainty of a martyr's bliss. Old for his age was Wali Mohamed, deadly serious over his religion, and possessed by the spirit of forceful mission. He was a survival of the fierce old days, the more dangerous because he would burn with a slow fire, unquenchable, once the match were applied.

Wali Mohamed was the last person who should have read the pamphlet, the history of which we have traced, but unfortunately he was one of the first to receive a copy. True, the man who wrote it had his tongue in his cheek, but he was still a man of vivid imagination and great poetical power. The pamphlet was eloquent with the wrongs of suffering India—with injustice and murder and rape and ungodliness—direct results of the rule of the *kaffir*.² The notes rang clear ; matters were not minced. Then, in the peroration, came the sudden call to the heart and courage of manhood, a cry for martyrdom and the promise of its reward. Youth must take the sword and prove itself very man.

It could not fail to kindle a spark ; in most of them the spark would flare up and die in a few hours. But in Wali Mohamed, the brooder, there was danger.

It may be said that a little sound common sense could have laid bare the fraud and the lies in five minutes. But whence could come this fountain of reason to Wali Mohamed ? Government discouraged any interference

¹ *Jehad* = Religious war.

² *Kaffir* = Foreigner.

with secret thoughts ; there was nothing to counter the evil appeal of the pamphlet. True, all copies were declared confiscate to Government within two days of the sowing ; the old man bound over ; the students oblivious . . . but in one heart the seed was certainly well sown.

CHAPTER IV

The time of Id—the festival of sacrifice—drew on apace. A month had passed since Wali Mohamed had first read the pamphlet ; daily, nightly, since that hour, he had had it in his mind. He believed intensely in the suffering it described. It was written, just as the Koran was written ; therefore it was true. The rule of the foreigner was steeped in innocent blood ; they were tyrants, oppressors, ravishers, enemies of the one God.

What was written in the Koran for guidance against the enemies of God ? . . . That true believers should take the sword righteously, and spare not.

To Wali Mohamed there was no question of ethical wrong in obeying this injunction ; on the contrary, the sacrifice was enjoined as a direct duty. Death to him would be certain. But he would have played a noble part ; men would bless his name ; and then . . . arms, soft arms, were awaiting him beyond, where he would lie for ever.

Id was enjoined as the time of sacrifice, and on Id Wali Mohamed concentrated all his mind. No blood of a goat this time, but blood more acceptable, red blood flowing from a white neck on to the glad earth. He had never spoken to a white man, never seen one close ; the oppressors had been apart from his world, and he had no single loyalty to one kindly face or voice to give him pause. There was nothing in the balance to weigh against his fixed idea.

His father had an old rusty sword—a cavalry tulwar—

now blunt-edged. Wali Mohamed took it and hid it in his bedding. At nights, when all was still, he would polish it, until once more the steel shone; one day, when his father was out, he put an edge on it with a stone. It was characteristic of him that he made all his preparations without letting a soul into his confidence. Secretive by nature, he became self-obsessed, believing that he had but to strike, and that a great light would shine in a dark world . . . that the others would take up the torch; that he was chosen. The spirit of a prophet was in Wali Mohamed in those days.

He had seen a saheb during the last Id, who had walked round a few streets, accompanied by the Police Inspector and the Bazaar Chowdri. This time he would come again. He, Wali Mohamed, would be waiting at the cross-roads before the Mosque; he would leap forward in the sight of all, and strike. He fingered the old blade lovingly at the thought.

CHAPTER V

The day of Id came. The streets were full of busy crowds, every man dressed in his best—gold tinsel round his cap, and gold work on his waistcoat. At the cross-roads in front of the Mosque there were gay spots of colour—green and purple and gold—against white garments. Men were talking and laughing there, and among them stood Wali Mohamed, his face set and his eyes fixed, as if he had drugged himself. He carried a coloured blanket over his arm, under which the sword was hidden. He was perfectly cool, and devoid of any excitement. If he felt anything, it was a strong sense of right, of justification—the feeling of a man about to do a clear duty. So he watched, staring, till he saw what he expected—a white man in white clothes and hat, walking with the Inspector of Police, while two constables

cleared the crowd before them, and the horses followed. Wali Mohamed stiffened for a spring. . . .

Little Jones, I.C.S., the man he meant to murder, was quite unconscious of his danger; he was called Little, because he only stood five feet six, and had the light hair, pink complexion, and blue-grey eyes of a boy. He had only been in India six months, and was enjoying the bustle and colour of his first sight of a festival, commenting on it to the burly Inspector in faltering Hindostani. He arrived at the cross-roads, and suddenly, with a loud cry, Wali Mohamed sprang out, waving his old sword . . . so youth met youth, and East greeted West. . . .

The attempt was childish, ludicrous; he had not the slightest idea of using a sword, and was disarmed before he could strike—knocked on the head with a baton, falling a desolate heap, while the crowd surged round.

Then sharp orders were given and the street cleared. Little Jones returned with a great story to the Club. Wali Mohamed was roughly conducted to gaol, with something very like a broken heart . . . there to brood and wonder for long months . . . to come out with a slur on his name and his questions still unanswered.

There is tragedy in the fate of Wali Mohamed; at least he had an ideal of service, with strength of purpose, and that fire of passionate devotion which might have served better causes. Yet it was his fate to kick against the pricks and wound himself, largely because policy will not allow intrusion on private thought or interference with the domain of religion, however perverted. So—‘one more sorrow for angels’—we leave Wali Mohamed, son of Islam.

Not far from the gaol a merry little man still writes busily; his pen courses over the paper; a sheet is finished; he reads it and gurgles with laughter . . . then puts his pen behind his ear, and trots jauntily round the corner.

PENDLEBURY'S TROPHY

CHAPTER I

ARTHUR ST. JOHN PENDLEBURY—known to his intimates as 'Pen'—was the beau-ideal of the cavalry subaltern, with plenty of friends, money, and self-assurance. Before he had been in the country a year, India was at his feet ; this is not to say that he had overstudied her languages or customs, but that he had sufficient means for fulfilling any of his aspirations, which were limited to picnics, polo ponies, and shikar trophies. To the latter his first long leave was devoted. To one who has stalked the Highland stag under the eye of an experienced man the stag of Kashmir seems easy game, and satisfaction was in Pendlebury's eye as he ran it over his pile of kit on Rawalpindi station : new portmanteau ; new gun-cases, containing his twelve-bore, his Mannlicher Schonhauer, his Holland and Holland High Velocity ; field-glasses and telescope ; kodak, for recording triumphs ; new tent, fully equipped with every device for comfort and cooking —altogether a capital outfit, pointing to an interesting addition to the Scotch heads in the hall at Pendlebury, for he could not fail to bag a Kashmiri stag or two in three weeks. To this sentiment Ali Baksh, his Mohammedan servant, agreed in perfect English . . . capital man, Ali Baksh—a real treasure.

The drive from Rawalpindi to Srinagar was quite pleasant, the scenery being almost English, though the

road was only so-so. On arrival Pendlebury resisted the tame temptations of picnic-making, and got down to business at once. He was not going to be bothered with consulting the old local bores in the Club, because the obvious thing to do was to get hold of a native fellow who could talk English a bit, and knew the ropes from A to Z, and such a man was known to Ali Baksh, who would find him out quietly and persuade him to accompany the saheb. His friend, he said, was the best man in Kashmir, who, being in constant request, would accompany only noted shikaris. Ali Baksh tactfully insinuated that Pendlebury belonged to the latter category, and Pendlebury of course believed him—for even the finished product of Eton and the Bullingdon is often singularly artless in the experienced hands of an Indian bearer.

At eleven o'clock on the morning after arrival, Ali Baksh produced the paragon, whose name was also something Baksh—Pir Baksh, Pendlebury believed him to say. He was a fine-looking, well-set-up fellow, with fierce moustaches and glittering eyes; nicely turned out too, with a khaki suit of military cut, mauve shirt, and neat puttees; he carried a long mountaineering pole, and had glasses slung in a leather case over his shoulder, and was altogether the type of what a shikari ought to look, and indeed does look in magazine illustrations. To the experienced old bores in the Club he might have appeared to overdo the part, but to Pendlebury he was the very thing. Besides, he knew all the likely spots, had excellent chits¹ from officers in quite good regiments, indicating invariable success, and, lastly, got on well with Ali Baksh.

So Pir Baksh was engaged on the spot—for the modest sum of one hundred rupees, paid in advance, for the three weeks' trip, and on the understanding that he would waste no time over uncertainties, but would lead on direct to the spot where an astounding stag had been marked down,

¹ Chit = Recommendation.

About this stag there was no doubt whatever, for Pir Baksh himself resided in its neighbourhood, and knew its haunts and habits so well that the stag might almost be said to be one of the family. He had been keeping it, he said, for a General, but could not resist the temptation of seeing it fall to the rifle of so noble a saheb as Pendlebury. They parted quite effusively, after payment had been made, and Ali Baksh accompanied Pir Baksh to make the bandobast.¹ Pendlebury washed his hands of these matters, so naturally did not see Pir hand over the stipulated thirty rupees to his friend Ali outside.

As Pendlebury remarked in the mess on his return from leave. 'What I like about this country is that you only have to get hold of a good servant, tell him what you want to do and how you like it, and say "Bazar chalo, bandobast karo."² He'll do the rest. Now I had a first-class bandobast up in Kashmir—never had to say a word myself; no use messing a good man about.'

And so it was—his two men certainly were not messed about, for between them they did everything, and ran Pendlebury—engaging ponies and carriers on the basis of a twenty per cent. commission for themselves; leading in men from the shops, who staggered beneath a vast weight of stores, some of which were destined for Pendlebury's consumption; making a great show of polishing things and cleaning clean rifles. There was nothing wrong with that bandobast, and Pendlebury could well afford to pay the hundred and fifty odd rupees which it was found necessary to disburse. In fact, the charm of the whole thing was that Pendlebury believed throughout that he was saving money—a fact which redounds to the credit of the astute pair.

The start for the first camp was worth watching; first rode Pendlebury, every inch a cavalry officer, his

¹ Bandobast = Arrangement.

² 'Bazar,' etc. = 'Go to the Bazaar and arrange.'

blue eyes full of good humour, and his cheeks quite pink with excitement ; his shooting suit was good to look upon, and Ali Baksh could certainly polish boots. At a respectful distance behind him rode Pir Baksh, resplendent in jodhpur breeches, while, last of all, Ali marshalled the kit, a fine staff in one hand, and in the other that emblem of the bearer, a brass hurricane lamp. It was a procession to be proud of, and successful shikar was in the very air.

The haunt of the famous stag was ten marches away, and Pendlebury beguiled them with small-game shooting and the taking of snapshots. The marches were very well run, and it was not the fault of Pir Baksh that a leather suit-case, the telescope, and a cartridge bag got lost in process of crossing a river. In fact Pendlebury thought Pir Baksh had behaved very openly about the whole thing, and had seemed to regard the matter as a personal loss—whereas, in truth, it was exactly the opposite. But for this mishap all went swimmingly.

They reached the little village at the edge of the forest in the evening, and Pendlebury's tent was pitched under delightful chenai trees near a little stream which looked first-class for trout. He could hardly sleep for excitement, and lay awake picturing the record stag and its record head, and hearing the sound of a high-pitched song in the bazaar, where, had he but known it, Pir and Ali were entertaining the local shikaris at his expense. Finally he shouted, 'Choop. Choop karo ek dam !'¹ and lay back with the satisfaction of one whose commands are obeyed.

Next day it was arranged that Pir Baksh should go for khubr² of the stag, while Pendlebury fished the river for trout. So Pendlebury sallied out with his split-cane and fly-boxes, and a man to carry his net, and another

¹ 'Choop,' etc. = 'Silence. Be silent at once !'

² Khubr = News.

man to bear his lunch, while Pir Baksh, with his glasses and pole and preposterous jodhpurs,¹ departed in the opposite direction. It was curious that so confident and so famous a shikari should require the assistance of a local man, a stranger of ragged and unkempt appearance—but we will suppose that he too needed some one to carry his lunch.

Pendlebury had a pleasant enough day by the bright, clear stream, and brought home several minute trout for his dinner. Of the movements of Pir Baksh little is known, except that he went quite a distance into the forest, starting at 10 A.M. and returning at noon, after which hour he sat with Ali and the local talent in the bazaar. Yet, when he was announced at 8 P.M., he entered the tent wearily enough, with much bazaar dust on his boots and puttees—so much that Pendlebury could see that the fellow had had a pretty stiff day of it. Pir Baksh was mysterious and confidential; in response to Pendlebury's eager inquiries he allowed that he had seen the stag, but when Pendlebury whooped with delight, he qualified this intelligence with the remark that the stag was *bahut hoshiar*,² and had only arrived on the scene in the late evening, after a complete day of tireless, lonely watching on the part of Pir Baksh. He had heard the stag at intervals and had not dared to move for fear of making it nervous. It would be as well to let it rest, under due observation, for a day or two, and then make certain of it. Incidentally he had heard in the bazaar on his return that another *saheb*, a well-known hunter, had set his heart on this stag and had hunted it for a month, but, since he had not seen fit to engage the services of Pir Baksh, he had not had a shot. It was finally suggested that Pendlebury would do well to visit a noted pool three miles down stream for the next day or two, and this

¹ Jodhpurs = Riding breeches.

² *Bahut hoshiar* = Very cunning.

Pendlebury agreed to do. After all Pir Baksh knew the ropes, and this stag was worth waiting for.

So for the next two days Pendlebury lashed the stream for trout, while each morning Pir Baksh started with a set face for the jungle and spent the day in the bazaar, arriving each evening at a later hour and more visibly weary and dusty. Each evening, too, the antlers of the stag had grown with its cunning. Rowland Ward's book, which Pendlebury of course carried, had no record in it to touch this head, as described by Pir Baksh; to Rowland Ward the head should go for setting up—none of your local mochis.¹ Pendlebury saw the foot-note in that book—

'Shot by A. St. J. Pendlebury, Esq., 'the Blue Hussars, Kashmir, 1920. A remarkable head, with record points, length and span.'

On the third evening Pir Baksh was very late indeed. Pendlebury had turned in, and had long lain listening to a perfect orgy in the bazaar, when, about midnight, Ali Baksh gave that deprecating cough whereby the Indian servant makes known his humble presence, and announced Pir Baksh.

A tired, grimy, dusty picture he made in the light of the electric torch, and a pitiful tale he told. He had sat up without food for a day and half a night—

'Bahut kam kiya, saheb. Main bilkull bhuka ho gya—bilkull. Kuchh nahin khaya gya.'²

Great indeed had been the sufferings of the worthy man (considering they had been experienced in the bazaar), but he had seen the stag at close quarters, and something told him that the saheb would shoot it to-morrow.

¹ Mochi = Leather-worker.

² 'Bahut,' etc. = 'I have worked very hard. I am utterly hungry—utterly. I have not had a bite.'

Such a stag—a Barasingha¹ indeed, with antlers like trees, and a roar like a river; such a stag had not been seen for twenty years, when 'Ismith' Saheb had missed just such a one, and had given him, Pir Baksh, his new rifle and a hundred golis,² vowing he would never shoot again. . . . 'Kabhi ham aisa Barawala nahin dekha.'³ Pendlebury was, of course, half out of his mind with excitement, and, had it been feasible, he would have gone out there and then and tried conclusions. As it was, he contented himself with lauding Pir Baksh to the skies, an honour which the latter accepted with sweet humility. He would make the bandobast; they would start out after tiffin, and would lie up till the evening. Let the saheb have no doubts; he would slay that stag, and his name would be great in Kashmir. . . . 'Kuchh shaqq nahin hai; qaza zarur hoga . . . zarur.'⁴

Like an echo outside the tent, Ali Baksh repeated the comforting 'zarur.'

CHAPTER II

Pendlebury arose at 6 A.M. for the stag which he was to see at 6 P.M., and spent the most nerve-racking morning of his life. He cut himself shaving; he fiddled with his rifles, and asked a dozen times whether he should take the High Velocity or the little Mannlicher; he counted out ten rounds of ammunition and laid them ready . . . then decided to take the other rifle, and counted out twenty more; then, finally changed his mind and decided to take both, with about thirty rounds; he stuffed his pipe too full, and broke the vulcanite stem in tapping it out; changed his boots three times; smoked quantities of

¹ Barasingha = Twelve-pointer.

² Goli = Bullet.

³ 'Kabhi,' etc. = 'I have never seen so great a one.'

⁴ 'Kuchh,' etc. = 'There is no doubt. Its doom is certain . . . certain.'

cigarettes, and burnt a hole in his copy of Rowland Ward with one of them; and he ate neither a good breakfast nor a sufficient lunch.

In fact Pendlebury did his utmost to spoil his eye and his hand, instead of strolling out with a rod and forgetting the great stag in the excitement of landing a pound trout, as any of the old bores at the Club would have advised him to do.

At last the great moment arrived, and Ali Baksh whispered, 'Pir Baksh here, sir.' With an immense effort Pendlebury assumed the nonchalance he did not feel, and strolled out of the tent, where he found Pir Baksh carrying a rifle and looking very businesslike in ancient garments; a ragged, disreputable stranger had the other rifle. When Pendlebury, who was feeling nervous enough already, objected to the latter's presence, Pir Baksh pointed out the advantages of having a man on the spot to help skin the shikar, and so had his way. On the way Pendlebury did a great many things which the old bores at the Club would have deprecated: he smoked too many cigarettes—'to steady his nerves'; he slogged along instead of walking quietly, thus laying up a clammy shirt for himself in the evening; also, he cursed the men for not hurrying, and then cursed still more when, half-way, he discovered that he had forgotten his second-best pipe, his flask, and his sandwiches. However, it was too late to do anything then.

They climbed uphill through thick forest bordering a little hill stream till they came to an open glen, with green moss at their feet and tall trees around them. Half-way up the glen Pir Baksh whispered a halt, and Pendlebury was led behind the trunk of a fallen tree, where he was asked to wait, without moving, while Pir Baksh and the stranger moved furtively off under cover of the trees.

Hours seemed to pass as Pendlebury fingered his

Mannlicher, the final choice, expecting every moment to see the dark shape loom in the glen. Time and time again he opened his breech to see if the thing were working, and feverishly moved the backsight up and down the slide, finally leaving it at five hundred yards, when a sudden sound startled him.

It was booming, long-drawn . . . the unmistakable roar of a stag far above him. He was at once certain that Pir Baksh had messed up the whole show, and that he ought to be farther up the glen; it would be dark for a certainty before the stag moved down; it was getting dark already. A twig cracked behind him, and he turned to see Pir Baksh behind him, holding his finger to his lips.

'Barawala ata,'¹ whispered Pir Baksh, while Pendlebury got into a position of readiness; there was no doubt about the approach of the stag, for it roared more than once, and was evidently moving down the little stream.

A quarter of an hour passed—the sun sank—still no view of the stag; in five minutes it would be too dark to see the foresight. Pendlebury began to fidget, when suddenly Pir Baksh touched his arm, and pointed . . . a dark shape was moving under the trees by the stream.

'Woh hai, saheb,' whispered Pir Baksh. 'Maro. Maro. Zarur lag jaega.'²

Pendlebury aimed his wavering piece in the direction of the dark shape, and squeezed the trigger. . . .

There was a flash and a kick—then a commotion under the trees, as a big animal splashed with a snort through the tiny stream and crashed into the undergrowth beyond—farther and farther away.

'Damn!' said Pendlebury—not so Pir Baksh, who sprang to his feet with a wild 'Lag gya. Lag gya. Zachmi

¹ 'Barawala ata' = 'The big one is coming.'

² 'Woh hai,' etc. = 'That's him, sir. Shoot! Shoot! You'll hit him for sure.'

hai,'¹ and, motioning to Pendlebury to stay where he was, ran towards the stream, throwing out a parting 'Milega zarur.'²

It was quite dark when Pir Baksh returned and informed the ecstatic Pendlebury that the stag 'sekht zachmi ho gya. Khun bahut hai. Aiye, saheb.'³ Up jumped Pendlebury and followed across the glen and the stream, where Pir Baksh borrowed his electric torch and searched the ground . . . yes, there was blood . . . first a mere drop on a leaf ; then, five yards on, a bigger splash ; farther still, a regular patch dyeing the ground. Pir Baksh explained that the beast had been hit forward—a truly wonderful shot—and had carried on to die. He would be found quite dead in the morning—till then there was nothing to be done.

On the way home, Pir Baksh, in the intervals of exultation, promised to make an early start, dissuading Pendlebury from accompanying him by remarking that this was only poor shikari's work, unsuitable for the Saheb Bahadur. Pendlebury was fagged out, and let him have his way ; before he went to bed he had a last loving look at the Mannlicher, which he found sighted at five hundred yards ! This he put down to carelessness in carrying, and congratulated himself that he had not had it at five hundred when he fired ; good shot as it had been, he would not have put the beast at over seventy yards . . . funny how he had felt certain that he had hit him before Pir Baksh spoke !

CHAPTER III

Pendlebury's next morning was almost as bad as the last. He clung to the camp, springing out of his chair at

¹ 'Lag gya,' etc. = 'He's hit ! He's hit ! He's wounded !'

² 'Milega zarur,' = 'We shall get him for certain.'

³ 'Sekht zachmi,' etc. = 'He is hit hard. There is much blood. Come, sir.'

the slightest sound ; he had occasion to throw his boots at Ali because the latter had made a noise like Pir ; once more he failed to do justice to his meals, and spent the day alternating between triumph and despair. But the hours never brought Pir Baksh, and at last he turned into bed and lay awake, listening. Presently he heard a hubbub, then saw lights outside. As he sprang out of bed he was greeted with the welcome 'Mil gya,¹ saheb,' in the dulcet tones of Pir Baksh ; he rushed out, and there, amid a crowd of admiring servants, stood Pir Baksh himself, grimed with mud and dust from head to foot, his clothes artistically torn, blood on his coat . . . but in his hands great antlers, branching out from a dragged mask.

Pendlebury whooped ; the servants sucked in their breath with wonder ; and Pir Baksh, in shrill tones, raised his pæan of victory. Twenty miles had he toiled ; fifteen hours without food ; but for the saheb's honour he would have dropped with fatigue and died. Even in death the great stag had been wondrous cunning, and would never have been brought to book but for the superior cunning of Pir Baksh ; there had been a personal encounter, in which danger had been gladly braved for the saheb, and a valuable life risked. Great was the name of 'Pendlebari Saheb,' who gives life to poor men, even to the humble shikari beneath his feet. . . .

This stirring recital—composed that day in the bazaar—was followed by that little lull which tactfully indicates baksheesh ² to the least imaginative of us, and Pendlebury rose to the occasion nobly. There was a hundred-rupee note for Pir Baksh ; twenty for the disreputable stranger who had given bahut madad,³ and who was described as a 'sidha admi . . . kam kernewala bhi'⁴ ; twenty

¹ 'Mil gya' = 'He is found.'

² Baksheesh = Largesse.

³ Bahut madad = Much assistance.

⁴ 'Sidha admi,' etc. = 'A straight man and a worker.'

more for Ali Baksh for being a good fellow ; and mithai¹ for all the camp. Pendlebury did things handsomely.

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The old Club bores might, with reason, have sniffed at that head had they seen it ; but, as it happens, it was packed straight off to Pendlebury's agents in Bombay, for shipping to London, on the advice of Pir Baksh—so there was no one to call attention to a resemblance between these antlers and a pair produced by the disreputable stranger aforesaid on the occasion of Pir Baksh's first visit to the bazaar. In point of fact both pairs had a similar chip off one of the brow points.

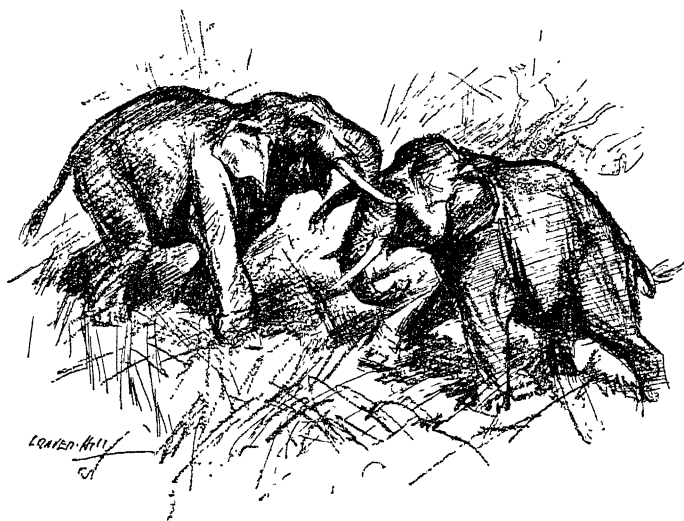
The stranger had asked twenty rupees for his pair . . . but who can fathom the mind of the East ?

Another trivial detail . . . Pir Baksh and the said stranger had slain a young stag on the second day, while Pendlebury was fishing, for they had feasted the village with fresh venison that night. It was also on record that Pir Baksh had retained the mask, and had bottled a small quantity of blood.

One more fact—Pendlebury had been mistaken about his sighting, and the stag at which he fired in the dusk was not a warrantable one ; at least, so the stranger informed me afterwards. Not that it matters, for the shot went well over its back.

But what matters ? The great head has the pride of place at Pendlebury Hall, and Pendlebury is happy whenever he sees it. And, anyway, Pir Baksh was an artist.

¹ Mithai = Sweetmeats.



THE PALE ONE

CHAPTER I

'THE PALE ONE' was one of the most mysterious creatures in the world—a she-elephant, queen of her herd and of the vast jungles wherein they moved. Her kingdom stretched from the blue Nilgiri Hills, through leagues of rugged hillocks clothed in scrub, to the dense jungles on the Cauvery's banks. She and her kind had but little to do with the works of man, save for the occasional descent on a village at the jungle edge, when they would maraud a few fields for fodder; sometimes too in the dusk, on the Ootacamund road or on the way to Mercara, men would see great shadowy forms ahead of them, and 'would flee—but she was hardly aware of man at all.

Perhaps her colour had attracted the great Tusker, who had wandered alone in the forests of Coorg until a

bullet drove him from his old haunts into the jungle by the river. One evening he saw the herd at drinking, and challenged at once, stamping and roaring and calling their ancient leader—the giant of the One Tusk—to battle; then all night he wandered round the bamboo brake, trumpeting defiance. In the morning the memorable battle started, which lasted three days and determined, in sight of all, the leadership of the herd. The jungle folk kept away; even the tiger and the buffalo avoided the battle-ground, where trees were uprooted and pounded into the floor; where the very forest swayed to the movements of the fighters, while the cows trembled for their calves, and the young males stood aloof and envied the prowess. At last height and great spirit won the victory over age and experience; the elephant of the One Tusk went alone and wounded from his kingdom, never to be seen again, while the great black Tusker danced the dance of victory and lorded it over the young males, and chose his bride.

She was of a paler grey than the rest, who were almost black, and her paleness came of an old stock, and won her his regard. So the Pale One knew her lord.

Who can tell of the wanderings of the herd during the three years which followed? They rarely stayed long in one place. In the rainy time they sought the hills, and in the dry time they followed the river, where they would stand at evening in the deep, draining great gulps, squirting one another, teaching the young to swim, revelling in the cool and depth of it. Great, black, shiny monsters they were, but by the side of the greatest of all was always one of paler hue, whom he served, towering over her with his immense height, full of tusk, broad of forehead, with great spreading ears. He ruled the twenty-five elephants of the herd sternly, nor brooked interference from other herds which crossed their path, so that they became famous, and had the freedom of all the jungles of the

south, with the coolest places for the heat, the best drinking pools, and the sweetest bamboo groves. No elephant ever stood in the path of the big black Tusker, lord of the Pale One.

In the third summer of their wandering, directly after the rains, there came a spirit of unrest on the herd. They were leaving the hills for the country of green scrub and luscious fresh food, welcoming the sun, which they had not seen for many days. Yet one day, as they stood basking in the open, a feeling of restlessness came on them. To an elephant this means either that he is in love or that he is being interfered with ; in the latter case it is the instinct of the curtailment of that freedom which is his birthright. The old mother of the herd felt it first, as it came on the breeze to her, and she communicated the news. They were not alone in the jungle ; something was stirring between them and the hills—other elephants perhaps—or something unknown.

One or two of the younger males threw up their trunks and squealed, and were promptly dealt with by the Tusker, who wanted to listen, and said so ; then shuffling and stamping ceased ; mothers quieted their calves ; only the breeze from the hills sighed in the grass and tiny birds twittered ; then from far away knowledge came to them.

The ground vibrated ever so slightly ; other elephants were afoot . . . a great herd . . . two, three herds . . . one from the direction of the sun, another from the hills, and another from the plain of great grass. But there was something else . . . a new smell, vaguely disconcerting . . . men.

Then an unusual thing happened : the big Tusker did not, as was his wont, turn to challenge the new herds, but began to move uneasily, aloof from the rest, throwing his trunk and shifting his feet ; presently he moved slowly away, and the Pale One joined him ; then, one by one, the rest followed. When they were together, the

rush quickened to full pace, and they thrust through the thickets, massed like a wedge, driving a road over the country, never stopping till nightfall. It was a new experience—the first of many—and it meant panic. The herd had rarely travelled like that, at full pace, *en masse*, careless of its mothers and the calves . . . and never for a whole day. But they got beyond the area of unrest, and were in free land again, where the ground brought no vibrations, and the breeze no upsetting smell. They did not forget these things, because only few things are forgotten by elephants, but they puzzled over them that night, and next day moved on towards the distant river jungles, not *en masse*, but in open feeding formation, eating as they went. For two days they travelled on over the low hillocks, each day making a longer midday halt; then, on the third day, they came upon a little pool with good green feeding on its banks, where they stayed a night and a day, carelessly feeding and wallowing. But at dusk they saw a new thing.

The older ones had seen it before, and thought little of it at a distance if they were hungry. What they saw was a line of little points of light, flashing out behind them, like stars over the hill; the wind brought smoke too, which tickled the trunk curiously; and there were little sounds, such as they had heard in villages; then a faint sound which they knew well—the far-off call of a she-elephant—the night call. Familiar it was, and yet unfamiliar; it brought back the spirit of unrest to them, for it was not a free call—it had trouble in it, such as they did not understand.

At the second trumpeting, the herd left the sucking mud and plunged into the darkness, careless of what they trampled or where they went, driving in fear through the night. From that time they knew restless days and nights; the sense of freedom had passed.

CHAPTER II

The twinkling lights were not those of a village, but of a great camp. There were a hundred camp fires on the side of a low hill, and round them many men squatted. The red glow lit up wild faces among the little tents and the trees; there was bustle of cooking and a good smell of hot food; pipes were being passed round from mouth to mouth, and in every group there was one who talked of elephants, and many who nodded. Here were grizzled old mahouts, heroes of many kheddahs,¹ who spoke of great elephants as if they were children, and wore the Maharajah's medals; their sons, smooth-faced young men in bright turbans, who hung upon their words; the elephant servants—thin, bearded Mohammedans, with sleepy, drugged eyes; the trackers—wild, hairy jungle men, almost naked, talking in strange tongues; and, besides, a motley crew of beaters and chamars² and water-carriers and coolies from Mysore and Malabar, who raised a babel of chatter. The only restful things were the lines of dim elephants in the background, silent for the most part, save when one trumpeted or brushed a branch to and fro with his trunk to clear it of dust. The fire flickers just showed these swaying forms under the trees, dignified amid the bustle, eating unhurriedly their heaps of green branches.

Meals were eaten; from some of the groups came snatches of song—the crooning of Southern love, and the triumphs of roping elephants; a drum was beaten in the shadows; then the talk died and men lay down, muffled in brown blankets, while the watchers sat silent. At last there was no sound but the shuffling and munching of

¹ Kheddah = Enclosure.

² Chamar = Tanner, leather-worker.

the great sentinels of the moving camp, the driving elephants of Mysore.

There was indeed good cause for the panic of the wild herd. That moving camp was full of purpose, and the khaki-clad man with the eyes of a hunter, who ruled it, knew his business. This was the central camp of three, moving in the form of a crescent over the elephant country, tracking herds, and persuading them gently forward day by day in the direction of the Cauvery kheddahs. At present they were rounding up, but their most difficult duty lay ahead, and began with the exact timing of the last drive at close quarters when the three groups should converge on the same day. But it was all hard work, for they were moving in country untouched by man, far from villages and crops—the country of wild elephant and buffalo. Their strange encounters in thicket and by river while driving or fetching chara¹ would fill many stories; but they were travelling all the time, tracking as they went, keeping touch with the other groups in a land of no communications, and rounding up stray elephants from the wild herds.

They had made touch with three herds in all, and the biggest was in the middle. Only one man had seen this herd, which had moved forward like a phantom at full pace, and he spoke of a giant, a rajah among elephants, and of a pale tuskless elephant, standing out of the welter of the rest; the mighty mallan,² the torn-up trees, and the scarred tree-trunks on the elephant path showed that he spoke the truth, and that this was the master herd. By the time the three camps had converged in the neighbourhood of Karapur, where deep jungle flanks the Cauvery River, the Pale One and her lord had become famous, almost legendary . . . the theme of many a mahout's prayer and triumph-song. The herd had the

¹ Chara = Feed of elephants.

² Mallan = Track of an elephant.

reputation of being restless ; as it was feared that they might overshoot the kheddah jungle and cross the river, they had not been overharried or molested. On the night before the kheddah drive they were tearing the bamboo near the river's edge, uneasy, but settled for the time being. There was a great suspense in the camp of two thousand men and two hundred elephants, gathered for the final act of their long drama.

CHAPTER III

Ever since the stampede from the pool the wild herd had travelled fast—too fast for the Pale One, who was shortly destined to present her lord with a son. More and more she had lagged behind, and only a great heart had helped her through. So when at last they reached the welcome shade of the river jungle she lay down and rested long, while the others were tearing at the trees and rejoicing at having thrown off the unrest.

But they rejoiced too soon, for on the third day, as they were moving for the evening drink, they heard the trumpeting of an elephant near at hand, again and again, whereat the big Tusker stopped to listen, flapping his ears and gently raising his trunk. There were elephants close behind them . . . but not only elephants—there were men, many men. Sounds of drums and gongs and stirring and shouting filtered through the trees as the herd fidgeted uneasily and began to mass. There was a moment of uncertainty, and then they saw lights in the wood, waving and bobbing, and waited to see no more ; they crashed forward, shambling through the dense growth till they came out on to the sand by the river, where the red rays of the setting sun lit up the water and intensified the gloom of the farther bank . . . then they plunged into the stream, the great Tusker leading and the Pale One in the

rear, and between them a surge of scrambling subjects, old and young, half-grown and calves, fighting to gain the gloom of the bank beyond.

Then suddenly that gloom burst into flame. Even the unconquerable drive of a wild herd was pulled up short. One moment all had been darkness and silence ahead of them; the next, men burst from the trees in hundreds with shouts and sudden noises like the rending of trees—and, above all, the lights. They could not face those torches. Dazed, bewildered, they turned up-stream, to find that elephants had put into the water from both banks and were advancing in line; the bank which they had left, too, was full of dancing, leaping men with lights. The herd hesitated; two young males broke away up-stream and flung themselves against the line: it was like dashing against a brick wall. They met four great old Tuskers, who pushed them squealing down-stream with ugly blows in the ribs, while sharp spears pricked them in tender places from above, and loud cracks rang in their ears; smarting, buffeted, stunned, they blundered into the deep water with a gurgle and a splash, and half swam, half floundered past the herd, which was standing at bay. A black mass they made against the red sky—the humped forms gathered round the big Tusker, who with angry eyes, ears out, trunk extended, awaited the first shock.

Then, with a rush and a bump, the line met them; there was a mighty swaying and pushing—loud gun-shots, flashes, sharp thrusts, cries of men, smell of gunpowder—all in a mêlée; but the advancing line had the advantage of science, impetus, and the stream, and the wild herd had to give, breaking and scattering suddenly, the Pale One leading the rout. It was not her way to flee, but she knew that she must reserve her strength and trust her lord.

So the herd broke, but their spirit was not gone.

Amid pandemonium from both banks there were a dozen individual fights as elephant after elephant broke back, leaving only the mothers with their calves to take their time and move on ; but, one by one, they encountered new tactics, for they were cut off, roughly hustled, and mastered in detail, fight as they would. The big Tusker, who held the rear, found himself the special charge of four full-grown elephants ; he could have tackled the lot in the open, unhampered, but here he was too angry for strategy ; when he knocked one out of his way the other three butted into him from behind ; and when he turned to vent his wrath he saw flashes and had stinging pains in the head. So he could but lash and storm and ramp like a half-grown elephant, sending up the water in great sprays around him, as he was gradually edged down below the steep right bank in the wake of the rest.

So the herd was passing down the river, when suddenly the Pale One stood still. Below her, stretched across the stream, she saw another line—silent, impassive, motionless—of full forty elephants. She looked right and left ; on the left the crowd still surged with their torches ; on the right was the high bank—but here was a gap in the bank and a track into dark jungle above. Slowly and uncertainly she made for that gap, still suspicious, but, as nothing happened, she walked up the track, past a fence, into a bamboo grove. Then the herd, bundled together between two converging lines, massed again and followed their queen ; last of all came the big Tusker, who stood proudly at bay in the middle of the gap. Then a whole constellation of flashes dazed his eyes, and he, the lord of the Southern jungles, turned and followed his herd. Something clashed behind him—timber on timber. They were in kheddah.

CHAPTER IV

It was as if they had passed through a nightmare, and had awakened in good feeding jungle and absolute quiet. True, there were fires round the circle of the bamboo patch, and a jumble of sound, but they were not molested. The younger elephants started at once to feed on the bamboo, but the great Tusker remained aloof and sulky, touring round the patch and trying the defences. He found that they were surrounded by a ditch that could not be crossed and a timber fence that could not be reached, and his defiant trumpeting woke the echoes and told the herd that all was not well.

But the Pale One was beyond caring, for her time was very near. That night she went apart from the rest, and in the morning there lay beside her a little crumpled grey object no bigger than a sheep-dog. In the dim morning she stood over it, and caressed it with her trunk, till soon it tottered to its feet, and felt for her; so she fed it, forgetting the nightmare for a while.

For a day and a night they had peace, and she grew to love her little one at her side, playing with it, feeling all over it with her trunk, giving her milk freely for its strength, watching it find its feet.

Then, on the morning of the second day, the nightmare returned. The great Tusker, in his pilgrimage round the ditch, suddenly came face to face with a line of elephants drawn up outside for battle; he parted the bamboos, and for a long time remained gazing, measuring, taking stock . . . then slowly turned and rejoined the herd. Then they heard the opening of the gates and the entry of the enemy . . . so the great fight began.

They had good hope this time; they had rested and were in the open—their own ground; and they were prepared. The Pale One went at once to a lonely corner,

her little one ambling along at her side, while her lord led the charge in mass formation at the centre of the line. But, as they closed, the noises started again, and the pricks in tender parts, and all the bewilderments of the first fight. Once more they encountered science that was not of the wild, for they were deftly cut up and hustled in batches in the direction of a tall enclosure with a narrow entrance. Soon it became evident that the strangers meant to drive them into that enclosure, and they resisted with might and main, breaking back again and again, scattering the enemy, then rallying to their leader . . . but always the enemy re-formed and encircled them. At noon honours were still equal, for the enemy retired outside, while the herd made for a muddy little swamp with shallow water in it, and for an hour drank deep for refreshment, and blew out spouts of muddy water to cool one another. Only the Pale One did not join them, tending her babe apart, ill at ease.

When the fight began again, the enemy had reinforced ; the herd was completely surrounded in the swamp, and hustled pell-mell towards the enclosure, where a last stand was made against overwhelming numbers ; nothing availed : willy-nilly they were bundled through the gap into the small enclosure, where they heaved and barged and squeezed, trumpeting and squealing, making the timbers creak.

Only the great Tusker managed to break away, irresistibly, as a ship drives through water, sending three elephants headlong before him. He stood near the gate, gathering his strength for an ugly rush, ready to take on the whole line in fair fight. . . . But the fight was not fair ; as he was advancing, there came the last indignity, and the first knowledge of slavery . . . the rope touched him. Deftly his head was lassoed ; then a hind leg ; then another ; then came a mad struggle against six elephants tugging at the end of the ropes ; he became aware of men

too, and struggled the more. The old freedom had gone ; he could not fight devilry—creepers that twined and would not break. Dimly understanding that his hour had come, and that his birthright had been stolen from him, he suffered himself to be drawn away by the six down a steep bank into the cooling river . . . out of sight of his herd.

So passed the great Tusker into the haunts of men for the years of slavery.

It was the Pale One who made the Homeric fight, which will be told over camp fires a generation hence. They found her in a corner, tending her babe, and she confronted them, pushing the babe beneath her body. Then they hemmed her in, but the trained elephants shrank from her and would not close, for all that she was the smaller and alone. Men said afterwards that she was bewitched, for she made the boldest half-hearted, and drove through them, butting with her broad forehead, striking with her heavy trunk. For an hour she led the hunt, and they could not catch her nor close with her ; even when defeat seemed certain she broke the line with the force of a ram, and the boldest turned from her. She was fighting for more than life, or the honour of the herd, or the freedom of the South : she was battling for her young, and dimly she knew what the loss of the fight would mean—the loss of the love she felt for him.

She never would have been taken alive had she not looked down and missed her babe . . . saw it being led away . . . gave a mad squeal, and chased, with destruction in her eyes . . . then thundered against the great gates of the palisade.

So at last they caught her easily enough. The Pale One had nothing more to fight for.

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In the evening she stood alone under a tall tree, the chain clanking at her leg. While the others trumpeted and fought their chains, she was silent, with an ineffable

sadness. Pale and ghostly she loomed against the glow of the camp fires, and men watched and wondered at her. Then they brought her the little grey elephant-babe, which ran up to her and commanded milk with its tiny trunk. . . .

The Pale One turned her head slowly away. The free days were past, and she would never know her babe again.



THE WEAK SPOT

THERE is nothing human so intricate as an Indian conspiracy. It is always tortuous to a degree—like a creeper climbing up the side of a house in an irregular, sinuous pattern. One forgets the parent root in the many branches and sub-branches ; but in places there are weak spots. The British Government owes much to these.

In this case the creeper was a great growth, with branches long and short, but never straight. The longest branch reached Russia, via Switzerland. Another ended in a newspaper office in America, and another straggled to Constantinople. Shorter ones ran to Kabul and Cairo, Tokio and Penang ; and there were many local shoots in India itself, connecting matters as distant as a mill strike in Madras, a rising in Malabar, a procession in Cawnpore, a coolie outbreak in Assam, and a bonfire in Bombay. No wonder the parent root of all this activity and growth was obscure. Yet one little tendril leads to the root sometimes. . . .

Mir Khan was an intelligent young man. After three years' service he had been promoted to the rank of lance-duffadar in a regiment which was careful of its promotions. His squadron commander recognised in him the best type of Pathan : slim and wiry in appearance ; a fearless horseman ; always well turned out ; with a lean, handsome, well-bred face, and a clear eye. Free from the

swagger which comes easily to his race, he gave an impression of unusual discretion, and was at the same time extremely observant.

Then, suddenly, he went completely off. This happened occasionally in the case of men of a too exuberant early promise, but in his case it was particularly disappointing. None of the usual reasons appeared—a zidd,¹ or a love affair, or a fancied injury. He simply became slack and mugra,² and took to bad company. It was found necessary to degrade him to the ranks, and he took the sentence very sullenly, becoming a regular loafer. He had done for himself.

A few days after his punishment, when Mir Khan was loafing in the bazaar in the evening, a man touched his arm and signed to him to follow. He was a thin, weedy, dirty-looking, sallow Mohammedan, clad in a grey shirt and filthy pajamas. His unkempt hair and ragged appearance made him the last possible associate of the Mir Khan of a few weeks ago. Nevertheless, Mir Khan followed him up a narrow street on to a waste place covered with rubbish. Then he came to business.

He suggested that Mir Khan had no reason to love the foreigner. Mir Khan spat at the mere idea. Then the man, who gave his name as Birkat Ali, gave him a short autobiography. It appeared that he had been a clerk in the municipal office, and had been dismissed. He had left Shahpur for Lahore, and there had met one Ali Shah, who was entrusted with the organization of certain matters there, and who had given him a letter to a butcher here in Shahpur, in the Naya Basti. This had led to his employment as agent of a committee in Shahpur, with the special duty of getting into touch with soldiers who had been unjustly treated by the foreigner. Hence his approach to Mir Khan. He mentioned some names of men in the regiment, and asked Mir Khan whether he

¹ Zidd = Feud.

² Mugra = Surly.

would join a cause which meant the certain extinction of the British Raj, hinting at other likely events in other unspecified places. Mir Khan eagerly assented, with an uncomplimentary remark about white faces.

It was accordingly arranged that Mir Khan should attend a quiet meeting the following evening. Then they parted.

So it was that ex-Lance-Duffadar Mir Khan entered the ranks of sedition. By degrees he learned that he was to be a party to as pretty a little conspiracy as ever was hatched by greasy men in the murk of a bazaar back-street. Three officers' messes were to be blown to the sky with bombs at the same moment, after which members were to rally the disaffected portions of their regiments. At the same time a crowd was to collect in the bazaar, where inflammatory addresses would be given. Thus all would be ready for the raid on the bank, the Government offices, and the railway station. Further instructions would follow ; meanwhile they were asked to prepare the soil of their respective regiments.

Mir Khan entered heart and soul into the business, taking an intelligent interest in details, and making such practical suggestions that he was shortly placed on the inner committee, which met at the house of the butcher, and which only communicated with the soldiers' meeting through Birkat Ali. This inner committee was a very important affair, including a prominent mullah¹ with a beautiful white beard ; an eloquent vakil² with a wispy dark one ; the butcher, a man of action ; and a venerable grey-beard, who made excellent bombs in tobacco tins. Mir Khan became the strategist. He it was who arranged three depôts in the bazaar, from which the men drew the bombs and conveyed them to the lines in clothes or food—two or three at a time.

Then Mir Khan's activity was rewarded with a high honour. The butcher received a letter to the effect that

¹ Mullah = Mohammedan preacher.

² Vakil = Lawyer.

he should send a servant to take over some hides at Benares, leaving two days hence by the night train, which would be met. The committee evidently understood this purely business communication, and decided that Mir Khan should have the honour of the mission—its object being no less than the discovery of the day fixed for their explosions—a matter too secret for letter or messenger. So Mir Khan obtained leave, ostensibly to visit his brother, his squadron officer being delighted to get rid of him for a day or so.

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Mir Khan changed into mufti and boarded the night train for Benares, inconspicuous in the motley crowd of sleepy travellers. The train arrived at midday, and he was met by a man in a white dhoti and calico cap—evidently a butcher's servant, who told him that the hides were ready. He was then led through a maze of streets to the butcher's house. There he met two other men, who looked curiously at him, deprived him of his watch, and blindfolded him. After that, he had a long, creaking journey in a hooded bullock-cart, such as is used for women, being finally bundled into a house and led upstairs. Then his bandage was removed, and he was left alone till nightfall. The room was dark, without furniture and windows, and he slept most of the time.

At last a man entered, whom he had not seen before, and who never spoke; this man blindfolded him again, and led him by the hand through silent streets as if he were a blind man, with a blanket over his head. They stopped and mounted a high step leading into a house; in an inner room the blanket and bandage were removed, and Mir Khan was shown a good meal, which he badly wanted. He was left alone for an hour, during which time he finished off the food. He had a sense throughout that he was being watched; this fact and his tortuous progress through the streets made it evident that he was

going to see some one of extreme importance, and he wondered what manner of man this was who took such mysterious precautions to conceal his whereabouts. When at last he was led upstairs, he had the surprise of his life.

He was pushed into a room which contained one man—but such a man! He was the fattest creature



‘He never took his beady eyes off Mir Khan’

imaginable; the little eyes, and the little nose, and the little moustache were the merest beads compared with the rippling chins; and the chins themselves were absolutely engulfed in a vast body. He was clad in a white shirt and a dhoti, and sat on the floor eating oranges. There was a pile of the fruit on one side of him, and a heap of skins on the other. As Mir Khan stood before him, he peeled another with a pudgy hand, showing a nice wrist-watch. During the brief conversation which followed, he never took his beady eyes off Mir Khan, and Mir Khan only once looked away from his.

Then he saw, through the window in the corner, the dark outline of a temple, on the left side of which a stick projected, bearing a strip of rag—a black silhouette against the moon, which was directly behind the temple.

They did not waste words; the great man asked about the progress of the Shahpur affair, and cracked a joke about the venerable maker of bombs. Then he said simply :

‘You will arrange for the bombs to explode on the night of the 21st—three days hence—at precisely half-past eight. You will not mention the date or the time to anyone before ten o’clock on the morning of the 21st. Much has been entrusted to you, and you will not be forgotten.’

Then he returned to his oranges, and Mir Khan was ushered out.

Mir Khan’s return to the station took, he would judge, four hours. He must have walked half over Benares before the bandage was removed from his eyes in a courtyard off a main street, and his watch returned. He was told that he could make his own way to the station. He found that a train left within an hour, so took his ticket and composed himself for the journey. At Lakhimpur he might have been seen to change his carriage, and at Raipur he slipped away on the offside of the train and was lost in the gloom. There he made his way to the bungalow of the Superintendent of Police, where his urgency procured him an interview. Within an hour a motor-car left the bungalow, in which Mir Khan sat by the chauffeur clad in the uniform of a police orderly.

The car arrived at Benares at midday, and further interviews followed—as the result of which some calculations were made, and plain-clothes constables dispersed quietly in the direction of various Hindu temples; they had special instructions concerning a temple from which a stick projected, bearing a rag pointing approximately East.

Reports were in before evening, with the result that a visit was paid to a certain house, where a man of gigantic proportions was found eating oranges ; indeed, he was so fat that they had the greatest difficulty in getting him downstairs.

He was recognised as a much-wanted celebrity, who had disappeared some years before with some thousands of rupees belonging to the Public Works Department, who had since been a most persistent weaver of plots, and who never would show himself abroad. The effect of his voluntary confinement was only too obvious. Anyhow, he was the big man—the presiding genius.

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So it came about that Mir Khan was forgiven for overstaying his leave, and highly promoted. He told the Colonel that he owed his success to the overhearing of a conversation between two discontented young men in his squadron. Thus his suspicions had been aroused. He had come to the conclusion that the best method of getting at the real ringleaders would be to make himself thoroughly disliked by all loyal men ; then, he had thought, he would probably be approached by the conspirators, ever watchful for recruits.

He had seen Birkat Ali more than once hanging about the lines, and the meeting in the bazaar, which had started him on his career, had not been a surprise to him.

The rest had followed as a matter of course, but he had hardly expected that he would owe his final success to three such trifles as a wrist-watch, sole vanity of a very careful man ; a piece of rag on a stick ; and the moon.

THE POOL

SOME three hundred years ago a little white temple nestled in a fold of the hills, like a mushroom in a green dell. It stood on the bank of a dark pool; wooded hills towered over it to the west, and barren hills rolled away to the east. It was a very holy place; men believed that the foot of God had touched earth here and had made a valley. So from time immemorial it had been a place of pilgrimage. Men journeyed to the hills to see it, and the steps leading down to the pool were often thronged with travellers in white garments, women in saris¹ of red and blue, sadhus² in orange and in yellow.

The water was dark—born of a deep-laid spring, which was never dry, and whose overflow ran away in a little tinkling rill into the deep woods. It was believed that the pool was bottomless—for what could resist the foot of God?

Animals came to drink quite near the temple without fear—dark, great-eyed Sambar stags—little barking deer of the colour of autumn leaves—mottled leopards. There were bright birds too about it—proud pheasants, and jays of vivid blue; big butterflies of dark green and blue, with swallow tails; and red dragon-flies haunted the reedy edges.

It was ever a place of great silence and of rest. A very holy man watched over the temple, sitting all day

¹ Sari = Woman's robe.

² Sadhu = Priest.

long, legs crossed, arms folded. He was said to be a hundred years old. His face was wizened and shrivelled and puckered in a thousand wrinkles. His head was shaven, and his forehead bore three upright lines of yellow paint. He wore but a single blanket of faded orange.

Such were the temple, and the pool, and the priest of the pool.

There came an evil day for that peaceful place. A horde of wild Mohammedan fanatics from below swept over the hills and descended like a scourge on the pool. The little old priest ran up the path towards them, his arms outstretched, adjuring them to spare the ancient holy temple. A swarthy man of great stature lifted his sharp sword and swept off the head of the little priest; others plunged their swords into the frail body, and they threw the wreck of it into the pool. They burned the temple and destroyed the peace of the place. . . . Then the pestilence passed on.

Thereafter, green rushes covered the whole face of the water, save where the spring welled up in the middle. Men feared to approach the pool, where pale figures were seen at night, and where a despairing cry was sometimes heard. The peace returned; the place was left to the animals and the birds and the butterflies. But the memory of it never died.

Time passed, and the surrounding hills came into the hands of an Englishman, a retired Colonel named Brown. He was not an unkindly man, but he had a strong belief in the absolute superiority of his own race, and in the inviolability of property. He was tall, with white hair and moustache, and a face whose natural redness was enhanced by the white suits and hats which he wore. He

made a pleasant estate in the hills; built a roomy bungalow; put up neat cottages; planted orchards; laid out paths everywhere; in fact, subdued the jungle with a system admirably English. Incidentally he cleaned up the pool, which lay just beyond his boundary. The villagers refused to do the work, but he imported labour, and cleared out the rushes and dredged up the mud. In the course of the work they found a number of blackened stones and rudely carved figures, which the Colonel gave to the Lucknow Museum. Evidently there had been some sort of a temple on the spot, which lent colour to the village talk. Then the spring was analysed and found to contain good water; so the supply was utilised, pipe-lines being laid on to the gardens. The villagers resented the whole proceeding, but they always did resent innovation. Colonel Brown was justly proud of his improvements.

Then the most annoying thing happened. The Colonel was walking round the estate one afternoon when he distinctly heard the mournful chant which accompanies a funeral procession. It was the usual thing—a sentence endlessly repeated by two alternate groups, first in full tone, then faintly, like an echo. It came from the direction of the pool. When he had turned the corner he saw the awful truth—a little party of men walking swiftly down the path and bearing a stretcher on which lay a body swathed in white. Mourners trotted behind, intoning their sad chant. They were actually going to burn a dead body near the spring-head! It was monstrous. They did it too; he saw the smoke curling up from the valley, and found logs of charred wood at the fringe of the pool the next morning.

That afternoon was the beginning of the Colonel's troubles. First he put a chowkidar¹ on the place, and the chowkidar was beaten by day and saw bhuts² by night,

¹ Chowkidar = Watchman.

² Bhut = Ghost.

and ran away. But the burning went on, in proportion to the mortality of the village. Then the Colonel summoned the head men, who talked nonsense about the place being holy from time immemorial. He dismissed them with a purple face and a few home truths. Next, he applied to the civil authorities, who declined to interfere, since the pool was not actually on the estate of Colonel Brown, and had certainly a reputed sanctity. Lastly, he wrote to the *Pioneer*—last resource of wounded pride—and complained of ‘the new spirit of pandering to the native, regardless of the position and rights of landlords,’ and wondered what the Government was doing.

In spite of all, the burning continued. People refused to burn anywhere else. They believed that here was sanctity for their dead.

Then worse befell. One morning the Colonel observed through his field-glasses a little strip of red rag floating from a tree on the margin of the pool. This would not appear to be of importance; but the Colonel knew India. That red rag meant a priest, and a priest meant pilgrimage. Never was proud banner a surer challenge than was that little strip of red rag. The red rag affected the Colonel after the proverbial manner. He descended on the place, breathing unutterable things.

All he found was a solitary figure sitting under the tree which flaunted the red rag. It was a man of middle age, clad in a blanket of faded yellow; his head was clean-shaven, and his forehead bore three upright lines of yellow paint. He sat motionless, with set, staring eyes. The Colonel asked him his business . . . no answer; then he made a sort of set speech on the rights of man . . . still no answer; then he began to shout, but the priest still ignored his presence. He failed to make any impression on that holy man. Angry as he felt, he knew better than to lay hands on a priest—so he marched off,

speechless with rage. They would build a temple next, he knew, if they were given a chance. So he stalked home and wrote a perfect sheaf of letters and appeals on the subject.

That evening the Colonel began a nasty attack of malaria. It is possible that he had been bitten by a mosquito on the occasion of one of his numerous visits to the pool, which was still a swampy place, hot and stuffy. However this may be, the mosquito which bit the Colonel knew his business. He was in bed a fortnight. His wife barely managed to pull him through the attack, which was unusually malignant. When he could get about again, his first walk was in the direction of the pool. . . .

There, like a mushroom in a green dell, nestled a little new white temple.

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With the reader's indulgence, the author begs leave to draw a picture dating some three hundred years hence. . . .

Colonel Brown is long forgotten. The Englishman, and his Government, and his rights, and his laws have faded away as a ripple dies on water—as a wind stirs in the trees and is gone. But on the bank of the dark pool a little white temple still stands, and still the pilgrims come . . . for such is India.